

BLUE AND GRAY

WEEKLY

Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1904 by Frank Tousey, 24 Union Square, New York.

No. 3.

NEW YORK, AUGUST 26, 1904.

Price 5 Cents.

HOLDING THE LINE OR, THE BOYS IN BLUE'S GREAT DEFENCE.

By LIEUT HARRY LEE.



Jack found himself within reach of the giant. His sword leaped forward, and, piercing Smith's arm, caused him to drop his blade. "Come on, you red monster! If you are a man of courage here is your chance!" Smith recovered his weapon.



WERTHEM

1840

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CHAPTER I.

THE NEGRO'S STORY.

The day was the seventh of August, 1861. The hour was nine in the morning. The place was the south bank of the Hampton River, in Virginia, not far from the City of Yorktown.

Here was encamped a company of young Union soldiers, known as the Fairdale Blues. Only a few miles away were the lines of General Magruder's Army of the Confederacy, fully six thousand strong.

The Fairdale Blues were a company of youths, none over the age of twenty. They had enlisted in the town of Fairdale, New York, under the command of Captain Jack Clark, a handsome and fearless young officer.

Hal Martin, a youth of eighteen, was one of the lieutenants. Tom Peters, a jolly, fat youth, with an inexhaustible fund of humor, was one of the corporals, and Joe Ward was a first sergeant.

The Fairdale Blues were as well equipped and thoroughly drilled company as any in the great Army of the Potomac.

They had played a brave part in the disastrous battle

of Bull Run, and had, with others, languished for a few weeks only in the trenches at Washington.

Then orders were one day received by young Captain Clark to join his company with the regiment to which they belonged and proceed to Hampton, Virginia, under the command of General Butler.

It is needless to say that the Fairdale Blues were delighted to board the steamer which took them to Hampton.

Here the regiment went into camp on the line of the Yorktown Road.

Fortress Monroe, that mighty and almost impregnable structure, was behind them. Before them was the army of General Magruder.

At this point a bridge crossed the Hampton River. General Butler had deemed it necessary to have a strong guard posted at this bridge in case the Confederates should attempt to cross the river.

Hampton, one of the most attractive of Virginian towns, was nearby. It was a time of waiting with the armies of the North and South, facing each other, as one might say, like two sullen dogs, each waiting for the other to jump.

At nine o'clock on the morning of the seventh of Au-

gust, Jack Clark, captain of the Fairdale Blues, was seated in his tent examining the company's papers.

At the tent entrance stood a sentry. Suddenly the sentry called out, sharply:

"Halt!"

Captain Clark glanced over his shoulder. Before the sentry stood a stoop-shouldered old negro.

"I jes' wants fo' to see de captin, dat's all," Jack heard him say. "Please let me see him, Mistah Soger!"

"The orders are that Captain Clark is not to be disturbed," said the sentry. "Come round in the morning, Pompey!"

"Kain't wait fo' dat. I jes' tole yo' I mus' see de young captin."

Now, the Union camps were over-run with negroes, both male and female, who were bound to look upon the "Yankees" as their deliverers. They bothered Jack so much that he had really given the sentry orders to turn them away.

But something in the looks and words of this old darky caused the young captain to change his mind.

"Yo' jes' tell de captin ole Pompey has got somefing berry important to tell him," pleaded the negro.

"Oh, of course! All you black people have the same story. You want to go North and never have any more work to do. Now, be off with you, or I'll call out the guard."

Jack arose and stepped to the tent entrance.

"Wait a moment, Smith," he said. "This old chap seems to be in earnest; let him come in."

The old-negro started forward eagerly and cried:

"Oh, fo' de lan' of glory! Jes' let me talk wif yo' one lily moment, massa. I jes' wants to tell yo' somefin'."

"All right, Pompey," said Captain Clark. "Come into the tent."

The negro obeyed. He stood, excited and trembling, before the young Union officer. Rolling his eyes tragically, he said:

"Oh, Marse Captin, I'se jes' a pore old brack man, but I done tole yo'—"

"Yes, yes!" said Jack, impatiently. "Get to the point, my man. My time is valuable."

"Well, Marse Captin, I jes' tole yo' dat de Confederates—dey am gwine fo' to move to-night."

Jack gave a great start.

He knew that negroes were constantly bringing information into the camp. Some of it was reliable.

But the most of it had proved otherwise. The simple, untutored nature of the black man led his fancy to at times take wild flights.

So that information obtained in this way was not at all times worthy of consideration. But, again, the manner and earnestness of old Pompey caused young Captain Clark to listen.

"Oh! They are going to make a move, eh?"

"Yas, sah! Dat am a fac'!"

"Ah! What is their move?"

"Dey is gwine to march down to Hampton to-night an' capture it!"

Jack was interested.

"Down to Hampton, eh?"

"Yas, sah! Dat am de troof. Ef it ain', yo' kin cut ole Pompey's ears off!"

Jack turned a moment and consulted a map. He followed its tracings with his finger. Then he said:

"You mean that General Magruder is going to make a move on Hampton to-night?"

"Yas, sah!"

Jack studied the old negro's face a moment.

"How did you learn this, Pompey?"

"I was down on de Yorktown Road, sah. I hide in de brush and de Confederate officers dey ride by reconnoiterin', sah. I hears dem say dat dey would capture Hampton to-night fo' suah!"

"Capture Hampton to-night," said Jack, in a mystified way. "As Hampton is not defended, that will be an easy job. But what is their game? That's the question! What do they want of Hampton?"

He was reflective a moment. Then his face lit up.

"See here, Pompey, you didn't imagine this, did you?"

"Fo' de lan's sakes—"

"That's enough! Who was your master?"

"Ole Marse Blackwood, sah, down yere in Henrico County. I neber leave him, sah, but he jes' turn us niggahs all out an' go to jine de Confederate Army, sah! Den ole Pompey he shift fo' hisself."

Jack saw honesty in the negro's face. He was at once satisfied. He called out, sharply:

"Corporal Peters!"

The good-natured little corporal appeared in the tent entrance and saluted.

"Take this colored gentleman to the Commissary Department and order him a day's rations in my name. Report to me here afterward."

The corporal saluted and led Pompey away.

Then Jack sat down and wrote a dispatch, as follows:

"To GENERAL BUTLER, Fortress Monroe: I have just learned, upon the authority of an aged negro, that General Magruder proposes to occupy Hampton to-night. As near as I can learn his real object is to make a dash and seize the bridge, with what further motive it is hard to guess, unless it be a general movement upon the main army. Please send me reinforcements at once to defend this point. Very respectfully,

"JACK CLARK, Captain Fairdale Blues."

A few moments later this message was on its way to headquarters. Then Captain Clark called his young first lieutenant into his tent.

He told him of the report brought by old black Pompey. Hal Martin listened with the deepest interest.

There is no doubt but that the negro has brought us a truthful report, he said. "A scout passed through the lines

an hour ago and said there was activity at Magruder's headquarters."

"There will then be a fight," said Jack, as he buckled on his belt. "I have sent to General Butler for reinforcements. We cannot cope with six thousand men unaided."

"They would wipe us out, cross the bridge and, for aught we know, even capture the fortress itself."

"That is hardly possible. But they could strike a blow that would be felt. Now, Hal, see that every man is made ready for active work. If General Butler don't send us the reinforcements—"

"Well?"

"We shall have to do the best we can. There is hot work before us anyway. Get everything in shape and report to me in half an hour with two horses."

The young lieutenant looked surprised.

"You are going—"

"I am going to do a little reconnoitering. I want you to go with me. We will leave the second lieutenant in command."

Hal hurried away to do the bidding of the young captain. Exciting work was certainly promised.

The Boys in Blue cheered when the announcement was made that they must hold themselves ready for hot work.

The memory of Bull Run was still with them and they had been thirsting for a fight ever since.

A little later Hal reported, with a couple of horses. He and Jack mounted and galloped away beyond the picket line upon the Yorktown Road.

The rebels were in full force at Yorktown, as they well knew. Scouting and raiding parties were constantly sweeping the intervening region.

So Captain Clark knew well that he was incurring no little risk, but this did not deter him.

After the picket had been left some distance behind, Jack pulled up his horse. At the moment they were at the brink of a small ravine, down through which the road led.

A small stream trickled through this. Beyond was a height which commanded the country beyond. Jack studied the situation for a time.

"Do you see," he finally said, "the Confederates in approaching the bridge from Hampton would naturally come through this ravine. Yonder height would be the key to the situation, if a stand was made against them. If artillery could be planted there an inferior force would hold them at bay."

"I suppose so," said Hal, who had not the eye for military engineering that Jack had.

"I tell you it is so," declared Jack, emphatically. "Hampton is only two miles below here. They would march up this road and cut through this ravine. An ambuscade could easily be planned here."

"Good!" cried Hal. "Let us do it!"

"First," said Jack, slowly, "let us go over there and climb that elevation. We ought to be able to see the enemy's picket outposts from there."

So the two young officers climbed down into the ravine and up the opposite height. As well as could be seen from this position Jack's theory was correct.

This was the very vantage ground that would be naturally sought by a line of defense.

There was, of course, the possibility of being cut off from the bridge by a largely superior force. But on the other hand, the defenders would count on reinforcements ultimately or as soon as news of the engagement should reach Fortress Monroe.

From the height Jack could, with his glass, see the outposts of the Confederate Army. To him it seemed as if they were heavily in force there.

After awhile they decided to return to their horses. These they found and were about to mount when Hal clutched Jack's arm.

"Sh! Danger ahead!"

To the ears of both came the sound of galloping hoofs. A moment later a score of mounted men dashed by.

They wore Confederate gray.

They were undoubtedly a scouting or reconnoitering party. Their presence so near Hampton was only further evidence that the old negro had told the truth.

There was certainly a movement on foot of Magruder's whole army.

"Whew!" whispered Hal, after the cavalcade had passed, "That was a close call for us, was it not?"

"Pretty close," admitted Jack. "The odds were against us."

The dense shrubbery had concealed them. They waited some while before venturing to mount.

But finally they sprung to saddle and galloped back to camp. As Jack entered his tent Corporal Peters saluted and said:

"A message for you, sir."

Jack took it and gave a start as he saw that it was from headquarters. Nervously he opened and read it:

"To CAPTAIN JACK CLARK, Fairdale Blues: Your message noted. I have other advices regarding Magruder's plans. Stories brought in by negroes are not always reliable. However, if attacked, be sure and hold the line. Make the best defense you can until I can send you reinforcements.

"B. F. BUTLER, General Commanding."

Jack handed this message to Hal Martin, who also read it. The two young officers looked at each other.

Here was a task which might well make them shrink. It was plain that the Commanding General did not realize its enormity.

Their small company of one hundred youths, plucky though they were, could hardly expect to hold the line for long against the tremendous odds of six thousand foes.

But this was expected of them, and they did not shrink from the task.

CHAPTER II.

THE GIRL SPY.

"I fancy General Butler has no idea that Magruder intends making a movement in this direction," said Jack.

"He cannot possibly believe it."

"If he did—"

"He would hardly leave us, with our small resisting power, to hold the foe in check."

It seemed to Jack Clark as if this was short-sighted policy, but he was not the one to question why.

His duty was but to do and die!

"Well," he said, conclusively, "if so much is expected of us, let us try and not disappoint the general. Perhaps we can seek the aid of strategy."

"It is our only hope."

"I believe more sincerely than ever that our strong point is to entrench that height on the Yorktown Road. We can throw out a long line of mock entrenchments to deceive them as to our force."

"Clever idea!" cried Hal. "We've got to hold the line, Jack. Let us show them what we can do!"

"We will!" cried the young captain, resolutely. "It is our chance, Hal. We will do our best!"

At once the young captain and his lieutenant began laying their plans.

They were thus engaged when the sentry at the tent door again called out:

"Halt!"

Jack looked out through the entrance and saw a tall, dark-featured man, dressed in Southern butternut jeans. He wore a wide-brimmed hat, and beneath it his eyes gleamed strangely.

"Pass me in ter see the captain, sentry," said the visitor, with a voice which showed a Southern twang. "I'm all right. I hev me credentials."

In an instant Jack had stepped to the tent entrance.

He looked hard at the newcomer.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "How did you get into this camp?"

"This passed me in," said the stranger, holding out a slip of paper. Jack took it and read:

"Pass the bearer, Cyril Scott, through the lines of the U. S. encampment at any time and place he may choose.

"Per order: B. F. BUTLER,

"General Commanding."

Jack saw that this pass was sweeping in its terms and the bearer must be a trusted and loyal man. So he returned it, and with a bow, said:

"Your credentials are all right, Mr. Scott. How can I serve you?"

Scott walked into the tent. He looked at Hal and then drew close the flap of the tent.

"I've got suthin' of importance to tell ye," he said. "I don't want no other ears ter git it. D'yer see?"

Jack bowed and looked at Hal.

"This is my lieutenant," he said. "He is to be trusted."

"Oh, he's all right," said Scott. "Now ye know me, I reckon?"

"Only from your pass."

"Oh, ye never heard of me afore, then? Ye don't know that I'm Scott, ther Union spy?"

"A spy!" said Jack, with a deep breath. "I see! That is why you are allowed to come and go in the lines as you please."

"Yas; an' Father Abe has sent me down here to see you!"

Jack's face flushed and his eyes kindled. A message from the President! This was an unexpected honor.

"What word does he send me?"

"Read this letter!"

Scott placed a letter in Jack's hands. Then he crossed his legs and fixed his gaze on the apex of the tent poles. He seemed to become oblivious of all else.

Both Hal and Jack could not help but regard him as a very strange man. They had never met his like before.

To all appearance he was a good type of the native of Carolina, but there was something in his voice which had the usual twang of the Vermont Yankee.

The letter, as Jack unfolded it, was seen to be in the easy, flowing hand of the President himself.

Thus it read:

"MY DEAR CAPTAIN CLARK: In these days of uncertainty and National calamity it is not easy always to find a man in whom one can place unlimited confidence and trust. I recall with pleasure the mission you so faithfully performed for me just before the battle of Bull Run. I have not had a chance to see you since, but I know how nobly you and your brave young company of Fairdale Blues covered the retreat that day. Much honor and glory is your due.

"Now, I seek to intrust you with another mission, scarcely less important. You need go little out of your regular lines of duty to perform it. This is what I wish you to do:

"For a long time, in fact, since the opening of the war, a very daring female spy has been operating here in Washington. She has worked under assumed names and sometimes in masculine garb. I do not know her name.

"She is at this moment somewhere near you, in the vicinity of Fortress Monroe. She has plans and papers which, if she succeeds in taking to Richmond, as is her effort, will entirely ruin our present plan of campaign and do irreparable damage to the Union cause. It is my desire that you take a guard of your company and apprehend her. I have information that she is almost out of our lines and is in hiding in the house of a certain planter somewhere near Hampton. My detectives are baffled. I believe you have the perspicuity and ability to divine her purpose

and head her off. Capture her, if you can, and report as soon as possible. Yours,

A. LINCOLN."

For some moments after reading this, Jack was silent.

Hal, who had also read it over his shoulder, turned and began to pace up and down. Scott, the bearer of the message, was as sphinx-like as ever.

Finally the young captain turned saying:

"Do you know the contents of this letter, Mr. Scott?"

"I do," replied the spy.

"Ah! Can you enlighten me further regarding this female spy? What was her assumed name in Washington?"

Scott shrugged his shoulders.

"She had a number of 'em," he said. "It would be hard to remember them all. I reckon she was mostly known as Jennie Carroll."

"Do you know where she is at present?"

The spy looked surprised.

"If I did, I'd jest hev turned her over to the Government afore this an' got the reward," he said.

"All right, Scott," said Jack, with a deep breath. "Are you going back to Washington?"

"Not yet! I'm going over to Beauregard's headquarters an' look around. Then I'm goin' to West Virginia."

"Very well, Mr. Scott. Will you not dine with us?"

"Thanks, but I think not," replied the spy, rising. "Mebbe I'll see ye ag'in afore the campaign is over. Good-day."

"Good-day."

Scott walked out of the tent. In another moment he had disappeared. Jack turned and reread the President's letter.

"I hardly know what move to make, Hal," said Jack, in perplexity. "Ordinarily one of us would take a detail and scour the country hereabouts for some sign of this female spy. But if old Pompey's message is accurate we must expect to meet the advance guard of Magruder's army to-night, or at least before morning."

"It's a conundrum," exclaimed Hal. "On my word, I don't know what to say."

The two young officers were in a quandary, but finally Jack made up his mind.

"It is not yet noon," he said. "We will take a dozen men and take in all the planters' houses we can reach today that are inside our lines."

"Good idea!" cried Hal. "We may find her in the very first one."

"True enough! She is certainly not beyond the picket lines, for the orders are, strictly, not to allow any white man or woman to pass in or out without the countersign or a pass. I believe she is still inside our lines."

"Trying to get through?"

"Yes."

It did not take the two young officers long to perfect their plans. In ten minutes a dozen men were in line before the captain's tent.

Out upon the highway leading north from their camp the little party marched. It seemed like a blind quest.

Every house that was encountered in the march was visited and searched and the inmates questioned. No trace of the spy could be found.

Several hours passed thus and the little detachment of Fairdale Blues was marching along in the dust of the highway when suddenly around a bend in the road there cantered a horseman.

The rider was small and slender and dressed in the usual planter's style—with linen suit and wide Panama hat. He instantly drew up, apparently in surprise, at sight of the troops,

"Halt!" cried Captain Clark, sharply. "Ride forward, sir, and give the countersign."

For a moment the planter seemed disposed to trust to the speed of his mare. Jack's sole motive in holding up the rider was to question him.

A number of muskets covered him and he hesitated. In a moment a couple of the soldiers ran forward and grasped his bridle rein.

The planter made no further resistance. He dismounted and stood before Jack and Hal. He was of slender, womanish figure, and wore a sharp-pointed goatee.

His face was white and delicate. He did not seem to be armed.

"Your name, sir?" said Jack, curtly.

"Alden Mayhew," was the reply, in a husky voice.

"Where do you live?"

"At Newport News."

"Were you on your way thither?"

"I was."

Jack put this all down in his note-book. Then he looked at the other penetratingly.

"We don't want you, Mr. Mayhew. You are at liberty just as soon as you choose to answer us some questions."

The planter, who seemed wholly at ease, smiled and replied:

"I am willing to answer any questions in my power."

"Very good. We want to ask you if you know Jennie Carroll, alias many other names, the Confederate girl spy?"

The planter looked at Captain Clark in a scrutinizing way.

"I do," he replied. This most unexpected and astonishing reply gave both Jack and Hal a great start.

"You know her?" exclaimed Jack. "Will you kindly tell us where she is?"

"No!" was the prompt reply.

Jack took a step nearer.

"I think we can find a way to compel you to tell us," he said, quietly. "You are under arrest, sir! Cartwright, take charge of that horse. Fall in, men, prisoner in line! March!"

This did not seem to weaken the resolution of the planter in the least. He was quite cool and unconcerned.

"You are losing time, and a right smart bit of it, too," he declared, laconically. "If you want to catch Jennie,

you'll have to make the most of your time. She'll be in Yorktown before dark."

"Not if we know it," said Jack, with bravado. "At any rate, if she gets there, you'll be the first man to hang."

Something like a chuckle escaped the planter. Cartwright, the guard who had taken charge of the horse, had glanced into one of the saddle bags.

He gave a sharp cry.

"Beg pardon, Captain Clark. It will pay you to look this way a moment."

Instantly Jack gave the command:

"Halt!"

The little column grounded their arms, and the prisoner's face paled. For the first time the planter showed fear.

It took Jack but a moment to reach the horse's side. Cartwright held the saddle bag open and Jack glanced within.

He gave a start of surprise.

Quickly he pulled from the saddle bag articles of female attire. There was a skirt, a short jacket and a handsomely embroidered waist. In an instant a startling thought flashed across the young captain's mind.

"By Jove!" he gasped. "Have we got the spy? Let us see!"

He turned and glanced at the planter. He saw the slender waist, the sloping shoulders and the delicate features. At once Jack spoke sharply:

"Let the prisoner remove his hat!"

The planter did not obey, but one of the soldiers did so. As the hat was lifted there fell down from beneath it a wealth of beautiful brown hair.

A great cry went up.

"It's a woman! And in disguise!"

Jack smiled and lifted his cap.

"Madame," he said, politely, "chance has worked in our favor. I have no doubt you are the party we seek. I am sorry, but we are obliged to retain you as a prisoner."

The female spy was deadly pale now, but calm. One of the soldiers took hold of the goatee she wore and pulled it off. It completely transformed her features.

In spite of the cosmetic and stain which she had used to disguise her complexion it was seen that she was a maiden of most rare and delicate beauty, though now she was resolute and defiant, her dark eyes flashing brilliantly. And with one glance an astounding truth burst upon Jack Clark, which brought a thrilling cry from his lips:

"My soul! It is Nellie Prentiss!"

CHAPTER III.

THE ESCAPE OF NELLIE PRENTISS.

At Fairdale Academy, before the war broke out, Jack Clark had as a dear friend and chum, a young Virginian, whose name was Will Prentiss.

With the outbreak of the war, Will Prentiss had gone

back to Virginia to take command of a company of Southern youths, who styled themselves the Virginia Grays.

It was a hard thought for Jack and Will that they must, in loyalty to that part of the country to which each belonged, take up arms against each other.

Their case was only one of thousands where friends, and even brothers, were compelled to become foes.

The Prentiss family was one of the most honored in Virginia. Colonel Prentiss had left his plantation to defend the cause of the Confederacy. Will Prentiss had raised the brave little company known as the Virginia Grays.

But Nellie Prentiss, his talented and beautiful sister, had not been content to remain at home.

She had played successfully the part of a female spy. By her clever work in Washington the Confederacy had greatly profited.

Jack Clark and Nellie Prentiss had met during a visit of the young girl in Fairdale. An attachment of the deepest sort had sprung up between them.

But now the war had placed a wide gulf between them. The effect upon each, therefore, as they now met—she in the role of spy, and his prisoner—can well be imagined.

Chivalry might have bidden Jack Clark to free her, but duty, the sternest of all, demanded of him that he hold her as a prisoner.

The safety of the country, the success of his cause, depended upon it. It was a hard moment for Jack Clark.

When he had received the letter from President Lincoln bidding him capture the female spy, he had never dreamed of her as being identical with Nellie Prentiss, the girl he loved, the proud yet gentle Southern maid, whose family line was one of the best in the South.

Pain, surprise and indecision were for a moment blended in Jack Clark's face.

"Nell," he said, in a sad tone, "this is an unexpected meeting, and I might say, one I would have gladly averted."

"The Confederacy needs the help of every true heart, whether that of man or woman," said Nellie Prentiss, in firm tones. "I am doing all I can for our cause."

"While I commend your bravery, I regret that—you cannot look upon the question in a light which seems to me to be right."

"It is certain that our views differ."

"It is a fact which gives me great pain. I—I am compelled to hold you a prisoner. Also I must ask for the papers and plans you have about you."

"As your prisoner I must comply," said the fair girl spy, as she took a roll of papers from her bosom. "It is well for you that I did not get through your lines. I would have carried to General Beauregard news of much value to him."

Jack took the papers and glanced over them. He saw that she had spoken the truth.

He then gave orders to have the horse brought forward. The girl spy was placed upon the animal's back and the march back to camp begun.

Nellie Prentiss was silent, as was her captor, Jack Clark. The dozen men of the guard marched in regular step. They

had not proceeded half a mile when a startling thing occurred.

At the moment they were nearing a clump of trees which lined a small creek. Here a bridge spanned the stream.

To the south was a road which led to Hampton. Until recently Hampton had been occupied by Confederate troops. These had been withdrawn when the Union troops at Fortress Monroe began to establish their outposts.

But in all this vicinity there were yet prowling bands of Confederates which at times ventured even to the very proximity of the Union camp.

So, as they approached this bridge, of a sudden Nellie Prentiss, in her disguise of the planter, turned her head and said:

"Halt! If you are wise you will go no further!"

Astonished, Jack Clark rode forward. He gave the command to halt. Then he touched his cap respectfully.

"Will you kindly explain your meaning?" he asked.

"With the greatest of pleasure," said Nellie Prentiss, impressively. "But first let me explain. I was to be met here by a bodyguard of General Beauregard's men. They were to be in Union uniform.

"That is why I fell so easily into your hands. Now, I am assured that a score of our troops are concealed in yonder woods. If I had allowed you to go on without warning half of you would be shot down at the bridge. But—" Her tone faltered and her fair face flushed as she lowered her gaze. "I—I could not do it, Jack—"

In an instant Jack Clark had sprung to her stirrup. One hand was upon the saddle pommel.

"You have done this for me, Nellie?" he said, huskily.

She inclined her head slightly. Then her manner changed. She straightened up in the saddle and her eyes flashed.

"Shoot me, if you will!" she cried, in a ringing voice. "You have defeated my purpose. You have my papers and I cannot now go onto the headquarters of General Beauregard. But I am going back to Washington. Shoot me, if you will!"

She dealt the horse a sharp blow and he broke away down the road. The soldiers raised their muskets, but Jack's ringing voice went up:

"Halt! Let no man fire!"

"But—she will escape, Jack!" cried Hal, excitedly, "Let us shoot the horse, anyway."

"No!" said the young captain, with white, set face. "She has just saved us from an ambush and annihilation at yonder bridge. She has earned her liberty—let her go. She tells the truth. We have frustrated her purpose and have her papers. Let her go!"

The Boys in Blue saw Jack's point and the justice of it. Every musket was lowered and as the fair girl spy checked her horse slightly at the summit of a rise in the highway and looked back, they swung their caps and cheered.

Then a startling thing happened.

From the clump of trees by the bridge came the puff and flash of firearms and bullets whistled among them.

Jack gave quick orders and the Boys in Blue separated

and sought cover quickly in the depression beside the highway. In a twinkling they were lying on their stomachs under cover of the broken ground and answering the fire of the foe.

Such of the Confederates as they could see were in blue uniform, a device used for the purpose of deceiving the Union pickets in the effort to escort the girl spy through the lines and to safety in the Confederate camp.

What puzzled Jack greatly was how they had succeeded in gaining their present point of vantage, for they were in the Union lines.

He was to discover later that one of the Union outposts had been captured by the ruse and the Confederates had been enabled to keep their agreement to meet Nellie at the bridge.

Guessing as much as this, Jack knew well enough that the Confederate guard would not long stand their ground.

The firing would cause a general alarm and might result in their capture.

They tarried only long enough at the bridge, therefore, to exchange a few shots.

Then they began an orderly retreat. Though they were double the number of Jack's party the young captain pushed on after them in the attempt to come to close quarters.

It was Hal who devised now what seemed like a certain scheme to capture them. After crossing the bridge he suggested this to Jack.

"If we take this lane to the south and make a break for the Hampton River we can cut off their retreat to Yorktown," he said. "Already our firing is bringing the relief guard, which will discover the capture of the outpost. A general alarm will give us plenty of help."

"Done!" cried Jack. "To the right, boys! Double quick!"

Down the lane swept the little detachment of the Fairdale Blues. They were now not over three miles from their own camp.

Their firing had been heard and now troops were advancing from the encampment of the main army about Fortress Monroe.

This relief guard would arrive just in time for the Boys in Blue to drive the Confederates into their ranks and, ordinarily, surrender.

But one thing aided the Confederates.

Their blue uniforms deceived the pickets and they were allowed to break through and gain the Yorktown highway.

Here they scattered, running into the woods and fields toward Yorktown. The plan of capture failed and they succeeded in making their escape.

Jack and Hal were disappointed, but it could not be helped.

Colonel Jones of the regiment which had responded to the alarm, now came up and demanded an explanation.

Jack gave it to him readily.

"You have the papers captured from the girl spy, have you, Captain Clark?" he asked.

"I have," replied Jack.

"They are of importance?"

"Yes!"

"What will you do with them?"

"I shall send them to the President."

Colonel Jones reined his horse about and said:

"I think President Lincoln will pay a special visit this evening to the headquarters of General Butler. If you present yourself there you may deliver them to him in person."

Jack's whole being thrilled.

"Thank you, Colonel Jones," he said, "I shall be pleased to do so."

Jack now marched his detachment back to the camp of the Fairdale Blues. He had the papers given him by Nellie Prentiss. He looked them over.

He saw at once that they were of value and of such a character that General Beauregard would have profited greatly by them.

Then he thought, with a thrill, of the brave and beautiful young Southern girl, and he felt secretly a sense of gratification that she had escaped.

He knew that the usual fate of a spy was death. He reflected with horror upon the possibility of such an end overtaking sweet Nellie Prentiss.

It was likely, though, that she would have been spared such a fate, though confinement in a national prison would have been a certainty.

"The war is a calamity for us all," muttered Jack, with conviction. "I pray that it may end speedily."

He was only one of the thousands who repeated that prayer in the weary months to come.

The more Jack reflected now upon the report brought into camp by old black Pompey, the more convinced he became that something was going on at Yorktown.

A reconnoitering party brought in information that the Confederates were making some sort of a movement along the road to Hampton.

Long and earnestly Jack pondered over the matter. He had done his duty.

He had sent word to General Butler and had received that distinguished officer's orders to "hold the line," in case of attack, until reinforcements could arrive.

Jack determined to take up his position on the elevation which overlooked the ravine leading to Hampton Bridge.

He longed for a piece of artillery with which to fortify his position, but he set his men at work digging trenches.

In a few hours two lines of these were laid along the eminence commanding the ravine and the approach to the bridge.

With a military eye Jack had chosen his position, and it was one of vantage under the circumstances.

If he had been pitted against the advancing foe without support he would have done far different.

Scattered, open formation would have been the order in line of skirmish. But he was to hold the bridge, and was promised reinforcements.

Therefore, it was his point to secure a position as un-

assailable as possible and hang on to it as long as he could, or until assistance arrived.

So he made his position on the eminence as strong as possible. Rations and ammunition for many hours of fighting were provided. The Fairdale Blues took up their final position just at dusk.

Had it not been for this clever work of Jack Clark and his Fairdale Blues the story of Butler's Peninsula campaign might have been a far different one.

If Magruder's forces had not been checked at Hampton Bridge and the Union line had been broken on that memorable night of the seventh of August, a national disaster exceeding any yet recorded might have occurred.

It was dusk when the Fairdale Blues finished their trenches.

Jack now believed the time had come for him to ride to Fortress Monroe and put the papers captured from Nellie Prentiss in the hands of the President.

So he secured a horse and, mounting, galloped away.

It was a ride of some miles to the great fort, but in due time he reached there and passing the guard entered General Butler's headquarters.

"The President is conferring with the general just now," said the orderly. "Had you not better wait?"

"It is the President whom I especially must see," said Jack. "Will you kindly present my name to him?"

The orderly disappeared. Jack, with some excitement, waited.

It was not long before the orderly reappeared and said: "Captain Clark, follow me!"

Jack followed the orderly into the great marquee tent. A number of officers stood just inside. In a chair at a camp-table sat General Butler.

Just at his right sat a tall, angular man, whose deep-set eyes held an almost sorrowful light. None could gaze upon that homely, plain countenance without a full cognizance of the fact that the owner possessed a generous heart and a spirit so humorous and kindly that to know him was to love him.

Beside President Lincoln stood a small boy, dressed in semi-uniform. This was Tod Lincoln, the President's much-beloved son.

As Captain Jack Clark of the Fairdale Blues saluted and stood respectfully before them, both the President and General Butler smiled and nodded.

"Here he is, Butler," said the President, genially. "If we only had a regiment like him we would have material enough for generals for a dozen armies."

"I believe you, Mr. President," said General Butler, biting at the end of his cigar. "Well, Clark, what have you to report?"

Jack took from his pocket the papers he had taken from Nellie Prentiss.

"Upon receipt of your letter this morning, Mr. Lincoln," he said, "I at once set out to, if possible, discover the girl spy. I succeeded in finding her and from her I obtained these papers."

President Lincoln's face lit up with pleasure. He took the packet of papers.

"This is good news," he cried. "Do you look these over, Butler. You have done your duty well, Captain Clark. But for your oft expressed wish to remain at the head of your company I should name you for promotion. But the spy? Who is she?"

Jack's face flushed and for a moment he was embarrassed. Then he replied:

"She is Nellie Prentiss, the daughter of Colonel Prentiss of the Confederate Army, and is from one of the highest families in Virginia."

"Jeff Prentiss!" exclaimed General Butler, in surprise. "I know him well. His daughter a Confederate spy! This is a surprise! You hold her a prisoner, sir?"

For a moment Jack could not reply.

CHAPTER IV.

HOLDING THE LINE.

Jack's face was crimson. He had not foreseen the present exigency. Should he confess that he had allowed the female spy to escape?

This might not be viewed by the President in the same light with which he had viewed it. Jack was for a moment spellbound.

The wandering gaze of all the officers in the tent were upon him. He hesitated, stammered, and finally said:

"She is not a prisoner now, sir."

"What!" exclaimed General Butler, sternly. "You don't mean to say she has escaped? This woman, who rightly should hang for all the injury she has done the Union!"

Jack stiffened and made reply:

"She has escaped!"

"Come, come, Clark!" said the general, angrily. "I hope you realize how serious a matter this is. This woman has for months kept the Confederates informed of our doings in Washington. We have used every possible method to capture her. Now, you tell us that she still has her liberty!"

"I am compelled to tell you that, sir. Although if I had realized that it was so important that she be retained I would have gone to greater pains to effect her recapture. But I cannot believe that the Government would hang her!"

"Let me have the whole story," said General Butler, coldly. "How did she escape?"

With this, Jack told in detail the incidents of Nellie's capture and her escape. When he described her spirited dash and the effect it had upon her Union captors, General Butler's brow darkened.

"You are culpable, sir!" he cried, sternly. "Sentiment has no place in war. That woman, beautiful and high-born though she might be, was nevertheless our deadly foe—a spy, an enemy to the Union, and she should have been held a prisoner."

"I am, then, at fault," admitted Jack. "I deemed it necessary alone to thwart her purpose. I could not bear to think of a woman suffering death on the gallows."

"She would not necessarily have met such a fate," said General Butler. "but it would have been wise to hold her a prisoner. This is a cloud upon your reputation, Clark. I am very much disappointed."

During this conversation President Lincoln had been silent. Now he spoke:

"I must disagree with one statement of yours, Butler. You have said that sentiment has no place in war. To the contrary, war is wholly a matter of sentiment, and without it war could not exist. But if I can read rightly between the lines, this is a case in which human hearts have proved too strong for the principles of duty, and if blame is to be attached to any one, let it be Cupid. Am I right, Captain?"

"We were school friends."

"I knew it!" said the President, in a softened tone. "We will excuse this remissness of duty in Captain Clark this time, Butler. Perhaps the young woman's value as a spy is lost, now that she is known in Washington."

General Butler had turned to his papers. He now looked up and said:

"You are fortunate in having so good a friend, Clark. I was tempted to order your suspension. Have you any further report to make?"

"Yes, sir!" replied Jack, promptly.

"Ah! What is it?"

"I have to report, sir, that there is great activity in General Magruder's camp at Yorktown. My scouts report that there is indication of a move toward Hampton."

"Hampton!" exclaimed the President. "Do you still hold the town, Butler?"

"Only an outpost or two," said the general. "I don't see what Magruder has to gain by occupying Hampton. We can shell him out any day we wish."

"But he might seek its destruction."

"Why?"

"I hardly know why," said the President. "but I believe there are many loyal residents in Hampton who ought to have protection."

"Very good," said General Butler; "if you learn of any concerted movement of Magruder this way let me know, Clark, and I will send reinforcements. Until then, keep your pickets out and if attacked, as I advised you once before, hold the line until you get help."

Jack saluted and replied:

"I have your orders, General Butler. They shall be obeyed."

"Furthermore, if you capture another female spy, see that she does not escape!"

Jack bowed silently. The President's eye had a merry twinkle as he added:

"Hold her a captive for life next time, Captain Clark, even though she is a Confederate. Accept my best wishes."

"I thank you," was all Jack could stammer. Then he left the tent. But he knew that, all said and done, he had

the sympathy and respect of both the President and General Butler for what he had done.

At any rate, deep in his heart, he was glad that Nellie Prentiss was still possessed of her freedom.

He was soon outside the fort and again in the saddle.

He gave his horse free rein, and passing the guards galloped for Hampton Bridge. It was not long before he crossed it and was hailed by his own picket guard.

Jack at once went to his tent. The boys were in their trenches and everything was in readiness for a possible attack.

Hal Martin entered the tent, and, with a salute, said:

"I have to report, Captain Clark, that one of our scouts has brought in word that a large troop of Confederate cavalry is not three miles north of here and coming this way."

Jack's face hardened.

"You believe this information reliable?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good! Send out videttes in that direction. When the alarm comes, see that every man is at his post."

"Yes, sir."

The young lieutenant took his leave. Jack Clark paced up and down, with plain anxiety in his eyes.

"I have done all I could," he mused. "General Butler cannot realize the enormity of this situation. I believe the Confederates mean to carry Hampton Bridge and even drive us back to the fort."

He had been commanded to hold the line with his little company of Fairdale Blues. It seemed like a mighty task.

But he was determined to do his best.

After carefully studying his maps, Jack left his tent and went out and along the lines of trenches.

Dummy cannons had been mounted where they would make the best show to deceive the foe.

The trenches were double the necessary length. Every device had been made use of to hold the enemy in check.

A voice sounded at Jack's elbow. It was Corporal Peters'.

"Captain, we have got word that the Confederate cavalry is only a mile from here. Ah! Do you hear?"

To their ears upon the night air came the distant sound of firing.

The videttes were being driven in. The crisis was on. Jack drew his sword and walked along the trenches.

"Keep cool, boys. We'll give them a hot reception. It is only cavalry."

The young captain did not believe that the cavalry could carry the hill where they were posted. So he had no doubt but that he could repulse them.

The firing was every moment drawing nearer as the pickets were driven in. Then the men themselves came rushing up the hill to the trenches.

A ringing Southern cheer was heard below and in the dim light the horses and men could be seen riding at the charge.

Up the ascent they came at full speed.

Jack raised his sword.

"Ready, boys! Wait for the word. Now you have it! Fire!"

A rattling volley was poured into the ranks of the cavalry. Horses and men went down. There was terrible confusion.

The first line of Union men fell back to reload. The second line sighted their muskets over the earthworks.

"Ready! Fire!"

The flash of gunpowder, the crash of the muskets smote upon the air. The second volley did the work.

The waving line of cavalry was swept back in a confused, wriggling mass. Yells and shouts and the screams of wounded horses went out on the midnight air.

Volley after volley the entrenched Boys in Blue sent into the lines of the foe until the whole cavalcade were swept back into the woods and out of range.

The repulse was a successful one, and with deadly results.

The cavalry did not make a second attack. They swept by and around the hill and into the highway toward Hampton.

They left a score of dead and many wounded upon the hillside.

It was a signal victory for the Fairdale Blues, and they sprung up in their trenches and cheered wildly.

"Hurrah! Hurrah for the Union!"

"Hurrah for Captain Clark!"

But Jack knew this was only the beginning of the storm. He walked anxiously along the trenches.

When assured that the foe had really decamped, Jack sent men down the hillside to bring in the wounded Confederates and minister to their needs.

There were a dozen of these and they were made as comfortable as possible.

To pursue the repulsed foe was out of the question. They vastly outnumbered the Fairdale Blues, who had the protection of their trenches.

But the cavalry regiment had now passed from hearing toward Hampton. A new revelation now arose.

Far away against the sky-line a distant fiery glow arose. It spread every moment until all seemed like a display of Northern Lights.

"What is it, Jack?" asked Hal Martin, as he joined his young captain.

"It looks like a conflagration," replied Jack. "I believe they are firing the dwellings in Hampton."

It was a thrilling sight.

General Magruder's purpose was plainly revealed. He was determined to destroy Hampton, for some unexplained reason.

"Why should they do that?" asked Hal.

"The only reason for it that I can assign is that Magruder fancies Hampton may some time afford good quarters for our troops."

"That is a barbarous thing!"

"So, indeed, it is, and I cannot believe that it is his sole purpose. There is some other move on foot."

"What can it be?"

"I can't say, just yet, but if we remain here we will find out. I feel sure the Confederates will strike for the bridge to cross the river."

"Well, let them come. We'll give them a hot reception."

"So we will!"

The glow against the sky was now of mighty proportion. The night breeze fanned the flames.

Jack watched it a few moments.

Then he went to his tent.

He wrote a message, as follows:

"To B. F. BUTLER General Commanding:

"Magruder has moved on Hampton and given it to the torch. Send us reinforcements, for they will certainly try to cross Hampton Bridge."

"(Signed) JACK CLARK,
"Captain Fairdale Blues."

One of the boys, mounted on Jack's horse, was sent to Fortress Monroe with this message.

It was some time before he returned, with the following reply:

"To CAPTAIN JACK CLARK:

"Hold the line at Hampton Bridge. I am sending two regiments to support you. Don't let Magruder cross the river."

BUTLER, General Commanding."

Jack crumpled the message in his hand and went out upon the earthworks. He studied the distant horizon for a long time.

Then he turned to Hal and said:

"Lieutenant Martin, send Corporal Peters here."

Hal saluted and departed. In a few moments the fat little corporal responded.

"Peters," said Jack, quietly, "would you be afraid to take a little scouting expedition out there toward Hampton?"

The corporal's eyes flashed eagerly.

"I will be delighted to go, sir."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well! I want you to take the uniform of one of those wounded Confederates. Take a horse—we have captured several—and ride out on the Hampton Road. Use care and see what you can learn."

"Very well, sir!"

"Wait! If possible ride as nearly into Hampton as you can. You understand me? I want to know if Magruder is coming this way. If you are captured, play a bluff game. You have the uniform to aid you. Can you simulate the Southern style of dialect?"

"In right smart style, sir."

"Good! You have it down pat. Now—but wait!" Jack knit his brow a moment in thought. Then, with sudden impulse, he cried:

"By the hornspon! I'll do it. Peters, I am anxious to see with my own eyes. I'll go with you."

CHAPTER V.

IN THE ENEMY'S LINES.

The decision of Jack Clark to accompany Peters on the scouting trip was made with the consciousness that no great risk would be incurred.

There was no immediate danger of an attack. The cavalry with whom they had had so lively a brush would hardly return to renew the attack.

Jack knew that much of importance was transpiring in Hampton and he was anxious to investigate the situation.

He could do this much better personally and this he decided to do.

So he called Hal Martin and placed the command in his hands.

"I will return at as early an hour as possible," he declared. "If I find the enemy are coming this way we shall hold our ground until the promised reinforcements come."

"All right!" declared Hal. "I will do my best."

Jack's horse was brought and he mounted and, with Corporal Peters, rode down to the highway.

They leaped the rail-fence and galloped away into the night. Exciting adventures lay before them.

For some distance they galloped on without seeing or hearing signs of the foe. Suddenly the road descended to a fordway.

Both were in Confederate uniform, so that they were ready to play a bluff game if the exigency demanded it.

They had reached the fordway and paused to let their horses drink.

Suddenly a startling sound came to their ears. It was the thud of horse's hoofs.

They were coming along the road from the direction of the bridge or behind Jack and Peters.

"They are right behind us," exclaimed the corporal, in a low tone. "What can we do, Captain?"

Jack was silent a moment.

The question was a hard one. It did not, however, take him long to make up his plan.

It was a daring one.

"Peters," he said, quietly, "I am going to try a sharp game. It will require nerve and shrewdness. Keep a cool head and trust to me."

"All right, Captain."

"This, no doubt, is a detachment of the cavalry which made the attack upon us at the bridge."

"That is likely."

"Now, do just what I do."

Jack reined his horse into the deep brush beside the stream. Peters now did the same.

They were out of sight from the road. They had not long to wait.

Down to the fordway, with rattle of accoutrements and buzz of conversation, rode a troop of horse. There were several hundred of the Confederate horsemen.

They paused as each line reached the water to let their horses drink.

When the straggling rear of the troop reached the ford, Jack reined his horse out of the bush and fell in with them. Peters did the same.

Their appearance was hardly noticed. Their uniform was sufficient to deceive the Confederate raiders.

Neither Jack nor Peters spoke, but quietly mingled with the troop and rode on.

Across the ford and up the highway they rode at a lively trot. Presently they broke into a gallop.

And now, as they gained high ground, a startling scene opened before them.

The town of Hampton was all ablaze! Every dwelling had been fired and made a scene to baffle description.

"You bet old Magruder will keep the Yanks from making quarters down there," declared a rider beside Jack.

"Yes," agreed the young captain, "it's a heap better to burn the place up."

"If we 'uns don't whip the Yanks to-morrow we will give 'em a right smart scare," said Peters, with perfect drawl.

"You bet we will!" chimed in a trooper. "We'll hev that fort or old Magruder has made a big mistake."

"Magruder don't do that."

"That's right, Smith! How are ye?" cried a trooper in the next rank.

"I'm feeling right pert. How are you?"

"Poaty fair. I say, them Yanks at the bridge give us a stiff fight."

"They had position. Wait till we get back there in the morning. We will whip 'em into shoestrings."

"I hope so."

To Jack and Peters this was edifying. Thus far their ruse had worked like a charm. But yet there was risk.

Down toward the burning town the cavalry now rode. At their head was a tall man, with a dark beard. He was Colonel Forrest, destined to win renown later as a famous raider.

As they drew nearer the town the sound of life and drum was heard. Down the highway surged lines of gray.

The army of Magruder was on its march to Hampton Bridge. Jack felt a thrill as he noted the number of the Confederates.

He saw that they numbered thousands. Already he foresaw a bloody encounter with the break of day.

And General Butler was sending only two regiments to reinforce the Fairdale Blues against this army!

Jack felt a thrill of misgiving. He had almost a mind to turn back at once and order a retreat across the river.

But just then an incident claimed his attention.

The advance guard of the army had reached a point where the cavalry was in sight. At once they halted.

A sharp challenge came from the infantry officers. It was answered by the Confederate colonel.

"This is Colonel Forrest's regiment. We were sent down from Newport News to clear the country for your march."

"Ah!" cried the spokesman of the Confederates. "General Magruder has been looking for you. Will you not report to him?"

"I am on an independent mission and cannot yield to subordination."

"That is not necessary. We are all working for the Confederacy."

So the Confederate colonel rode forward and consulted with the Confederate general. Meanwhile cavalry and infantry rested on their arms.

The result of the conference Jack could never learn.

But presently Colonel Forrest rode back and gave the order to turn back. At full speed they galloped away toward Hampton Bridge.

But this was not their destination. They suddenly swerved into a side road and rode for a number of miles at an angle with the main highway.

Then they turned again toward the Hampton River. At first Jack was puzzled, but soon he came to an understanding of what it all meant.

He recalled that the ravine back of the eminence defended by the Fairdale Blues extended in this direction.

The purpose of the cavalry was to get between the Blues and the river. This would cut off their retreat.

When the game became apparent to Jack he smiled. He recalled the regiments sent by Butler from Fortress Monroe.

There would surely be a collision between the two bodies of men. It would mean a battlefield with the advantage of being in the territory of the foe.

However, Jack could only feel that the news of their approach should be sent at once to the defenders of the bridge.

It must certainly fall, in spite of the individual bravery of its defenders, unless they were forewarned of this flank attack.

He was riding in the troop and could see no way at present to disengage himself.

On they rode until suddenly the waters of the Hampton River were visible in the gloom of the night.

Northward now along the river bank they rode.

Suddenly a halt was called. The Confederate colonel gave orders to dismount and rest on their arms.

This was a surprising order, and Jack and the corporal were unable to understand it for awhile. Then they comprehended what it really meant.

They were waiting for the infantry attack on the other side. A sudden tremor seized Jack.

For aught he knew Magruder had artillery, with which he could easily shell out the little company of Blues. Driven from their entrenchments they would be forced back into the Confederate cavalry.

It was a trick characteristic of Magruder. Jack saw the fate of the Blues settled.

Horror seized upon him.

He now regretted having left them. The impulse was upon him to break away and go to their assistance.

Only one thing could save them and this was sufficiently heavy reinforcements from General Butler.

These had been sent, but where were they? Why did they not come?

These were the questions which surged through the young captain's brain. But the cavalrymen had now dismounted and with rough quip and joke were caring for their horses.

Jack and Peters were obliged to do the same. But Jack had made up his mind to get out. He felt that nothing more could be learned by remaining.

He knew that his presence was needed by the Blues. With the information which he now had he could work to much better advantage to repel the foe.

"By cracky! We're in a bad fix, Captain," said Peters, with a wry face. "They've got us hedged in on all sides."

"It looks bad," agreed Jack, "but we've got to get out of the scrape."

"What shall we do?"

"We must rejoin the Blues in some way, at any cost."

"All right. I have a plan."

"What is it?"

"Just now a call for pickets was made. The name of John Wellman was called, and as he could not be found I answered to the name."

Jack was astonished.

"You?"

"Yes."

"Then you are named for picket duty?"

"I am. It occurred to me as a clever chance to slip out of the camp. Ah! Here comes the guard now. Watch sharp and learn where I am stationed. Then join me later."

"All right."

In the same instant a daring plan had occurred to Jack. He said nothing, but stepped back into the gloom as the corporal and guard came along.

"John Wellman, Troop A!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" replied Peters.

"Fall in for guard duty!"

Peters fell into line and marched away. Jack kept safely in the rear.

It was an advanced picket post to which Peters was assigned. He was stationed at the head of a ravine, the very one which led to the entrenchments of the Fairdale Blues.

The corporal and guard marched away, leaving Peters at his post. It was necessary to walk two hundred yards to hail the next picket. This was a wide gap in the line.

It would not be long before they would, presumably, be on the march again.

Jack hung about in the gloom until he was sure that the coast was clear.

Then he crept down to the spot where Peters was in waiting. The young corporal had just completed his beat.

"Hello, Pete!"

"Hello, Jack! Everything is all right."

"Yes. We are safe to cut and run now. It's not half a mile over that hill to the trenches."

"Our picket ought to be near here."

"That is so!"

"Well, the sooner we get out the better, is it not?"

"Yes—but—what do you think of a plan I have?"

"What is it?"

Peters lowered his voice to a whisper:

"Suppose I stay here on picket? You take a run up there to our camp. We can't stay there, with the Confederates on both sides of us. If we do, they will overwhelm us. Is not that right?"

"It looks reasonable."

"Very good! Suppose, then, that we turn the tables on them. You can bring the boys down here and I will let you through the line on the quiet. We can surprise this camp and capture their horses. We can then mount and go back to our trenches and hold the line as long as we can and then, when it gets too hot for us, mount and ride for the bridge to meet our reinforcements."

Jack was staggered by the daring plan of the little corporal.

It certainly afforded a means of beating the cavalry, unless some unexpected thing arose to prevent.

Jack whistled softly.

"That plan was just beginning to dawn upon me, Pete," he said. "I believe it is the solution of our troubles."

"I think so, Captain," cried the corporal, eagerly. "Let us try it."

"Done!" cried Jack. "Hold your post here. When you hear my whistle you will know the signal."

"Yes."

"All right. I am off!"

Jack darted away into the gloom. Before he had gone far he heard Pete answering the call of the next picket:

"Three of the clock, and all's well!"

"All's well!"

Jack knew there was no time to lose. Daylight would soon come. That would reveal their numerical strength to the foe and spoil the ruse.

It was necessary to act quickly. One thing puzzled the young captain of the Blues.

And this was why the infantry of Magruder had not yet attacked the Blues. Had there been some change of plan?

Had they diverged from the direct course to farther make the trap complete? As these thoughts coursed through Jack's mind he grew anxious.

It also convinced him that Pete's plan was, after all, the

CHAPTER VI.

FIGHTING IN THE DARK.

The establishing of the picket line by the Confederates was simply a precaution, which seemed hardly necessary.

very best that could have been conceived. With all haste he sped through the underbrush.

As he drew nearer the summit of the hill he was suddenly hailed:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

In a few moments Jack had made himself known to the picket. It did not take long for him to reach the entrenchments.

Hal Martin met him, excitedly.

"I am glad you have returned, Jack," he cried. "Do you know, I believe we are to be attacked at once by a heavy force of the Confederates, who are coming up the Hampton Road?"

"I have no doubt of it," said Jack. "Have they fired upon the picket yet?"

"No, but we expect to hear of that at any moment. I am glad you have returned to resume the responsibility."

"Well," said Jack, earnestly, "it is a responsibility of no light sort. We are at this moment literally hemmed in by the foe."

"Hemmed in?"

"Yes."

With this, Jack described the situation. Lieutenant Hal Martin listened with surprise and dismay.

"My soul!" he exclaimed, with pallid face. "We are lost, Jack. We shall be exterminated or forced to surrender."

"No!"

The young captain of the Fairdale Blues spoke with determination. Hal gave a start and asked:

"What will save us?"

"Call every man into line, Hal. We have got to act quickly. Leave all effects here that we cannot carry."

"What! You mean to evacuate this position?"

"Yes, at once!"

"But—where shall we go? We have the foe on all sides."

"Ask no questions. Do as I bid you. Have every man in marching order in ten minutes. Never mind tents or camp equipage!"

Hal hastened to obey the astonishing order. In the specified time the Fairdale Blues were in line, ready for marching.

Jack drew his sword and placed himself at their head.

"Boys of the Fairdale Blues," he said, forcefully, "we are now obliged to make a bold and desperate strike. Our lives depend upon its successful execution. I want you to follow me as silently as possible. All depends upon a quick blow. Forward, for liberty and the Union!"

A rippling cheer burst from the lips of the Boys in Blue. They followed their young leader with quick step and brave front.

Just as they evacuated their entrenchments distant firing told that the pickets at the north were being driven in. There was not a moment to lose!

Jack knew that if this firing was heard by Forrest's cavalry they would move forward to the attack. Caught between two fires the situation of the Blues would be desperate, indeed.

Down the slope went the brave little company. Deeper into the undergrowth they crept.

It seemed to Jack Clark as if the distance was interminable. On and on they went. His hearing was strained for some sound of the firing, which he knew would be the signal for Forrest to move.

All would be lost if this was heard, for the success of the attack depended wholly upon the surprise.

But for some reason, possibly owing to the difference in the ground and the hills about, the sounds did not make themselves evident as was the case on the summit of the hill.

Now a little stream was forded. Then Jack heard a faint whistle.

The sound reassured him. He had reached the picket line.

A moment more and he was gripping hands with Corporal Peters.

"All clear, Peters?"

"All clear. Pass right through, silently. You have everything your own way. The horses are tethered in a little glen to the right."

Then Jack called his men up and in low tones imparted to them the plan of attack. They listened eagerly.

"They outnumber us three to one," he said, "but we shall have the advantage. We shall take them by surprise. All depends upon quick action. We must get between them and their horses. The moment we have succeeded in beating them back we must secure horses enough for mounts. The rest we will stampede."

There was an effort to cheer made by a few forgetful soldiers. But this was quickly repressed.

Then the little company of Boys in Blue moved forward.

Stealthily they crept on until the encampment of the cavalry could be seen. Camp-fires were not allowed, but the Confederate cavalrymen reclined upon the ground or stood about in knots.

There was no formation or any position by which they might expect to resist an attack. It was plain that they had no thought of such a thing.

Nothing could have worked better for the Fairdale Blues. Everything was in their favor.

Jack located the horses. Then he led his men between them and the camp. The time to strike the blow had come.

With a wild cheer the Boys in Blue burst out of the underbrush and rushed upon the foe. It was a most astounding surprise to the unsuspecting Confederates.

There was a slight show of resistance, but the Blues, at the point of the bayonet, drove them into the brush.

Jack acted with lightning quickness. He knew what a blow it would be to the cavalrymen to take their horses.

So he swung his company of plucky boy soldiers into the glen, while a line of them kept up a volley with the retreating Confederates.

The horses were captured and such of them as were not required to mount the whole company were stampeded

It was an exciting time.

The air was full of flying bullets, the Confederates firing from the darkness wildly. Their officers were trying to rally them.

Jack knew well enough how important it was that he should at once make sure of his safety.

The cavalrymen outnumbered the Blues three to one. If they should suddenly turn the tables upon them the result might be most disastrous.

So the young captain of the Fairdale Blues shouted:

"Mount and ride as quick as you can. Close up the rear there! Corporal Peters, cut those horses loose!"

The stampeded horses sped away into the darkness. The Blues, with a cheer, gave their own captured horses rein.

Away they dashed down the ravine, with Captain Jack Clark at their head.

It was a mad ride in the darkness. Four of the boys dropped from their saddles. Their fate was never learned.

Jack knew now that his best move was to at once ride for Hampton Bridge.

He must somewhere on the way meet the reinforcements sent him by General Butler. It would then be in order to make a desperate stand against Magruder.

So the Fairdale Blues, now transformed into a cavalry regiment, rode madly away toward Hampton Bridge.

The first gray light of dawn began to break in the east when they came out upon the highway leading down to the bridge.

"By jingo!" cried jovial Tom Peters, "I am glad to see daylight once more. I must say I don't like fighting after dark."

"Nor I," agreed Jack. "Now, boys, we must gain Hampton Bridge and hold the line there just as long as it is in our power to do so."

"Hurrah! Hurrah for Captain Clark!" shouted the boys.

But even in that moment a thrill of dismay seized Jack.

"Halt!" he called, sharply. The little company drew rein. Just ahead, hardly half a mile, in the early light of the morning a thrilling sight was beheld.

The glitter of uniforms and the flash of bayonets were distinguished. Also, now they heard the regular beat of a drum. A large body of Confederate troops were between them and the bridge.

CHAPTER VII.

A SOUTHERN GIRL.

It was a most startling reflection to the Boys in Blue that the enemy was between them and Hampton Bridge.

It might be only a detachment or it might be Magruder's whole army.

In any event, it intensified the peril of their position. They were completely cut off and hemmed in.

The foe were all about them!

It was a time for serious thought. The boys sat glum and depressed and awaited the decision of their young captain.

"By Jove! How are we to hold them back from crossing the bridge, Jack?" asked Hal Martin.

"You've got me," admitted Jack. "It looks as if we would do well to escape capture."

"We cannot stay here!"

This seemed true enough.

Jack soon made up his mind what course to pursue. He turned his horse and leaped the rail-fence beside the road. He rode up a small eminence from which he had a view of the country about.

It was easy for him from this point to see the point on the hillside where their last entrenchment had been made. He was given a start as he looked thither.

He saw that the standard of a Confederate regiment waved over the trenches.

It was plain that they had taken possession of the deserted point of vantage. Jack's gaze kindled and a sudden impulse caused him to exclaim:

"All right, my friends! We shall soon have the pleasure of driving you out of there."

On the other hand, he could see the country extending to the Hampton River. To the north there still hung the smoke-pall which marked the burning of Hampton.

Far away, in the direction of Hampton Bridge, Jack saw some moving mass which he took to be a body of men.

Whether it was a regiment of Union or Confederate infantry he could not tell.

He watched it for some moments. Was it the reinforcements to be sent him by General Butler? This was a question.

Jack decided to strike southward and try to ride around the Confederates. If he could do this, and reach the bridge before them, all would be well. In any case he could not make his position worse.

To add to their troubles the Boys in Blue had run out of rations. Hunger, unopposed, is a hard thing to bear.

Now that they had horses it seemed a logical matter to do a bit of raiding on their own account.

Jack led the way and the little troop rode away down a lane fringed with trees. For a mile they galloped on.

Then a startling thing happened. From a patch of woods just beyond a broad field there came a wild, thrilling cheer.

The boys saw gray uniforms. Bullets whistled through the trees.

They recognized this attacking body of Confederates as the cavalry regiment from whom they had stolen their horses.

It is hardly necessary to say that the Blues did not care to discuss the matter at close quarters with the infuriated and wronged cavalrymen.

They reined their horses off to the eastward, cutting across the country with a wild cheer of defiance.

"Let 'em follow us, if they can," shouted Peters. "We'll give 'em a good chase."

The route they took was toward the Hampton River, and at a point below the bridge.

Jack now believed that he could cut across to the bridge and head off Magruder's skirmish line. If he could do this he might keep them from at once crossing the river.

So he rode on. But horses and men were hungry and exhausted.

Turning a bend in the highway they came suddenly into the great yard of a Virginia farm. There was the great rambling old house, with its double-decked piazza.

The yard was filled with fat and sleek chickens and a number of fine razor-back pigs were enjoying themselves in the dirt.

The plantation, however, did not seem to bear the appearance of thrift it might once have borne.

The negro cabins were empty. The fields were untilled and things looked decidedly slack.

On the lower piazza sat a young girl. She was not especially beautiful, but yet bore the stamp of intellectuality, and she was dressed neatly and becomingly.

Jack called his boys to a halt.

Then, with cap in hand, he rode up to the piazza.

"Pardon me, miss," he said, politely; "I am, as doubtless you may see by my uniform, a Union soldier. I ask you in the name of the Union Government to give us food and drink such as your place here affords. We will pay you money for all that we require."

The young girl arose with a queenly air. Her face was cold and her manner haughty.

"I am a Confederate soldier's daughter," she said, stiffly. "I cannot show favors to the foes of our government."

"One moment," said Jack, coolly but firmly. "We are in great need. This is a time of war, and sometimes necessity becomes a virtue."

"Oh, you are going to say that you mean to take my chickens and pigs without recompense!"

"Indeed, I do not, miss. I am a man of honor. If anything is taken from your estate, it shall be paid for."

"My products of the farm are not for sale."

"You say your father is a soldier in the Confederate Army?"

"I do."

"If he was here I feel sure he would not turn hungry men away, even though they are Unionists. I know Southern hospitality too well."

"Our hospitality, as well as our rights, have been outraged by you Northerners."

Jack saw that he had caught a tartar. He only smiled, however.

"Assuredly, miss," he replied, quietly, "you have a poor opinion of us Northerners."

"Yes, I have."

"Why?"

"Well there are many reasons. One is, that Northerners are always selfish and arbitrary. You can't trust them or stoop to make friends with them."

Jack was staggered.

He had met many Southern girls before, but none with

such spirit and pride as this girl, Nance Lee, which he soon learned was her name.

"Have you ever lived in the North?" he asked, quietly.

"No, but I have seen enough of your people since the war began. What right have you to come down here and make war on our people? We have never done anything to harm you."

"I believe you," replied Jack. "And I think the war is all wrong, but your people are up in arms as well as ours."

"They are defending themselves."

"That is your point of view."

"I think it is correct."

"I don't."

Jack rubbed his chin.

"Really, Miss—"

"Lee, if you please; Nance Lee. A name we are not ashamed of here in Virginia."

"I am honored to know you, Miss Lee. Do you know that our argument reminds me very much of the National argument between the North and the South? Both of us believe we are right, and in that very belief we are both wrong."

"You are epigrammatic."

"No, do not say that. Really, we are both in the wrong. There should be nothing but friendly feeling between us."

"If all your people talked that way, there would be some chance of a settlement of the question."

"Do you know, Miss Lee, this war is all the result of a most fatal misunderstanding. The South thinks we want to deprive it of its rights. That is only the talk of agitators and politicians. It is not 'rue.'

The light of incredulity did not fade entirely from Nance Lee's eyes. She looked at Jack with interest, however.

"Well I must say you are the squarest Northern man I ever met!"

"Then you have never met a very correct type. I am only one of millions that hold the same view."

Nance Lee arose and walked down from the piazza.

"I only wish I was sure that you mean that," she said. "It would change my views greatly."

"I can only pledge you my word of honor."

"Where are you going now?"

"We are on our way to Hampton Bridge."

"Magruder, with six thousand men, is marching thither."

"I know that well. We hope to head him off."

The Southern girl looked surprised.

"Do you know what that means?" she demanded. "They are six thousand to your hundred. Magruder would crush you with one sweep of his arm!"

Jack was about to say that he expected to meet reinforcements, but he checked himself, and, touching his cap, said:

"Miss Lee, I must express my pleasure at having met you. I would like to hold further discussion with you concerning the issue between our people, but a soldier's duty demands that I go on. We have gold and would gladly buy chickens and other articles of food of you. But if you do not choose to sell, we shall pass on."

Jack made a low and sweeping bow. A little cry escaped Nance Lee's lips. Her face flushed, and she stepped down from the piazza.

The young Union officer reined his horse about again and she said, in a low and earnest tone:

"Which way are you going?"

"Down to the highway and thence on to Hampton Bridge."

The young Southern girl put up her hand.

"No," she hoarsely whispered, "I can't see you do that. You are too fair and noble. I know all about it. There is a plot to ambush you at the end of that lane, half a mile below here. They would shoot you down like dogs. I know all about it. I may be untrue to the Confederacy in doing this, but I could not see you go to your death."

She was pale now, and trembling, and gazed apprehensively over her shoulder.

Jack listened to this with amazement.

It stirred him strangely that this young and beautiful Southern girl should make such a noble sacrifice for him.

In an instant he was out of the saddle.

"Miss Lee," he cried, impetuously, "now I know that we Northerners cannot regard you of the South as real foes. You have done us a great service. You have saved our lives. But this gives me surprise. We have seen no sign of the Confederates on our way hither."

"Ah, but you are in deadly peril! For weeks this region has been overrun with scouts and spies. At this moment you are almost surrounded, and I fear you will not escape with your lives!"

"What are we to do?"

Nance Lee looked about her like one in the presence of great peril.

"Then she said:

"I think I can save you. Follow me!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ON TO HAMPTON RIVER.

Jack Clark ordinarily might have viewed the girl's declaration with some suspicion of treachery.

But one glance into Nance Lee's wondrous eyes dispelled this.

He would have trusted her beyond all else. There could be no guile in her heart, he was ready to swear.

If Jack had been an impressionable young man he might then and there have lost his heart to this fair Southern maid.

"Follow me!" Nance Lee had said, and with cautious tread she had led the way toward a paling which was to be seen beyond the house.

Beyond the paling was a large peach orchard. What was beyond that Jack could not guess.

But just at that moment he felt a touch on his arm.

Tom Peters, with a light of anxiety in his eyes, said, in an undertone:

"Are you going to trust her, Captain?"

"Trust her?" exclaimed Jack, almost hotly. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing, sir, only these Southern women are never to be relied upon. They are more bitter and treacherous than the men. It's a mighty easy thing to lead one into a deathtrap."

"Corporal Peters, it is not for you to question this move. You will obey orders and not volunteer advice!"

Jack felt sorry the moment he had spoken, for the expression of pain on Peters' face was so genuine that he instantly repented his stern reprimand.

Nance Lee had now reached the gate in the paling.

She opened the gate and said:

"Ride through the peach orchard. You will find a path. Keep on until you reach the highway. You will then be beyond the line of the foe. Then go east across country. Shun the highways and you will escape!"

"Forward by twos!" commanded Jack. Then he raised his cap and said:

"I trust we may meet again, Miss Lee, under more friendly conditions."

"That will only be after the war is over," she said.

"Very well! We will call it that. After the war is over!"

"I believe our captain has lost his head over that girl," whispered Sergeant Joe Ward to Hal Martin. "I can hardly blame him, for she is a beauty."

"No one can deny that," said Hal. "Ah, what did I tell you?"

Suddenly from the road which led to the highway, and up which they had come, there dashed a troop of Confederates.

It was evident that they had been hot on the trail of the Blues, but they had arrived too late.

The Blues were beyond the paling and in the peach orchard.

"Oh, ride! Ride for your lives!" cried the pretty Southern girl. "You don't know what it means. Oh, ride for life!"

The Blues dashed down through the peach orchard. Bullets whistled after them and they heard the horses of their pursuers right after them.

Jack was half tempted to turn and give them battle.

But the certainty that they greatly outnumbered him deterred him. He saw that it would not do.

On dashed the Blues. It seemed an interminable distance through the peach orchard.

But finally a clearing showed beyond. A rail-fence lay between them and the highway.

With a cheer the Blues put their horses to it. Once over it they did not proceed down the highway, but crossed it.

There was a reason for this.

Down the highway, not a quarter of a mile, was a line of infantry. As Jack's eye caught them he in that instant adopted the only logical plan to evade his foes.

He was pursued by the enemy. They were now on his left and an unknown region was on his right.

Under the circumstances he believed that his only and best move was to go straight ahead.

And this he did. The result was that he accepted Nance Lee's advice, which proved to be logical.

On the other side of the road was a fence, quite unusual in that part of Virginia, a stump fence. This is one of the worst of barriers.

It was too rough and uncertain to jump. The horses went wrong and there were a few spills. Two of the boy riders were injured.

Jack saw that the only way was to look for or make an opening in the fence.

None could be seen anywhere. Time was most precious.

The general alarm had been given and the barrier before them must be overcome. By Jack's orders a dozen of the Blues dismounted and put their strength to one of the huge stumps.

It heaved and rolled and was finally completely removed from the line of fence. Through this opening the Blues rode.

But a sudden idea seized Jack. The temptation was upon him to give the foe a bit of a lesson.

He gave quick orders to his men. They rode up behind the mighty stumps, and, leaning their rifle barrels on the stumps, made good aim.

The foe were now in sight, rushing on swiftly. Jack was actuated by a number of good and original ideas.

He would give the foe a volley. His position was for the moment of immense advantage. He could mow down a line of the pursuers without much chance of losing a man.

Jack was soldier enough to know that the attacked has all the advantage of the attacker. It is an easy matter for one hundred men behind a good barrier to hold over a thousand at bay.

This was precisely what happened. The infantry, many hundred strong, came rapidly up on the left flank. The cavalry were immediately in front.

Jack had no idea of standing his ground. He was working on the principle of "Strike and get away," after the manner of a clever boxer.

"Ready, Blues!" he shouted. "Give them a good one! Fire!"

There was a tremendous crash of firearms. Yells rose upon the air. The infantry line was not within range.

But the cavalry got the full benefit of the volley.

Men rolled from the saddle and riderless horses were careering over the field. The advancing line faltered.

"Ready, Blues!" shouted Jack again. "Give them another!"

Crack! Crash!

The muskets of the Blues boomed upon the air. Again the cavalry line was riddled, but now Jack was wise enough not to try to hold his ground longer.

He had checked the foe. He had dealt them a hard blow at little expense.

It was enough! He gave the order to fall back. A little ways beyond was higher land, with a ledge formation.

Here good shelter was again afforded and again the foe received a volley. The ground was strewn with dead men. It was a costly pursuit for the foe.

Not one of the Blues had been as yet even wounded, except the two who were injured in jumping the fence. This was the best of fortune, but presently a new danger threatened them.

The infantry had begun to close up. They were throwing their lines out to, if possible, surround the Blues.

But Jack saw their purpose and decided to thwart them. He turned at right angles in the other direction. Every moment they were nearing the Hampton River.

During a lull in the firing Hal Martin came up to Jack and said:

"There is firing up the river!"

"Up the river?"

"Yes."

"That is queer!" exclaimed the young captain. "Is there a general battle along the Hampton River, of which we are only a little skirmish line?"

"It looks like it."

This was a certain fact. The outlook would indicate a move all along the line. Magruder's expedition and the burning of Hampton was only part of the game.

"I have it, Captain," cried Tom Peters. "At last our reinforcements have arrived. It is too late to hold the foe in check, but we will give them the deuce, if we can join forces. Suppose we strike out for the scene of all that firing?"

"A good plan!" cried Jack. "But there is an obstacle."

"What?"

"Yonder line of infantry."

This was true. The infantry lay in their path. It would have been insanity for the Blues to attempt to charge through them.

The situation was rapidly growing delicate, especially for the Blues. Something must be done, and at once.

Again Jack Clark's powers of generalship were severely tested. But as usual he hit upon a clever plan.

This was to diverge still further, this time to the south. At once the Blues were given the word to advance.

They galloped rapidly away and out of range of the infantry. This was a fortunate move for them, for another wing of Magruder's army had been sent to cut them off in the south.

The Blues escaped and getting beyond the intended cordon made a detour and finally saw the turgid waters of the Hampton River below them.

"There is the river, boys," cried Jack. "We are to hold the line and prevent the foe from crossing. Every man is expected to do his duty."

The firing to the east was now quite heavy and indicated that the battle line was growing nearer.

It was certain that the main body of Magruder's army was trying to force a passage across the river.

This gave Jack a great thrill and he longed to be on the scene.

He decided to work his way along up the river and take the chance of being headed off by the Confederates.

The little company was jogged along at a lively pace. The country was rough and progress somewhat difficult.

There were ravines to cross and gullies to clamber through. The course of the river was straight enough, but in places gave way to swampy inlets and reaches which involved a long detour.

But every moment the sounds of the firing grew nearer.

Suddenly out of a copse in their path sprung a man, dressed in a semi-hunter's garb.

He held up his hand and shouted:

"Friends, all! I am a scout. I see you wear the Union blue, so we are friends."

"Yes," cried Jack, as he rode forward, "and I am glad to see you. We want news badly. What is going on up the river?"

"Magruder has burned Hampton."

"We already know that."

"He has so sent an expedition to cross the river and, if possible, drive back the Union line."

"Then reinforcements have been sent from Fortress Monroe?"

"Yes. Are you the company known as the Fairdale Blues?"

"We are."

"You are Captain Jack Clark?"

"I am."

"I am Thad Scott, scout and spy. I have a message for you from General Butler."

CHAPTER IX.

A HARD TASK.

Scott, the spy, extended a letter to Jack. The young captain opened it and read:

"MY DEAR CAPTAIN CLARK:

"Word has reached me of your valiant conduct in entrenching Squirrel Ridge and thus holding the Confederate advance in check until our reinforcements could reach Hampton Bridge. You have accomplished a great work and we are much pleased. By the bearer I send this order: You are to at once proceed down the river to the plantation of one Lucius Lee, who is to our knowledge in hiding there at present.

"Capture him and bring him to headquarters at any cost. He is a notorious spy and the assassin of Colonel Fritz Schell. He must be run down, for he has in his possession plans of this fortress and other papers which, if placed in the hands of Jeff Davis, would do the United States much harm. He is hiding on his plantation at this moment, waiting for further information from a woman spy and confed-

erate in Washington. You may encounter detachments of Magruder's army, so it will be necessary to proceed with all caution. But we have sent a squadron of cavalry across the river to drive in the right flank of the Confederates, if possible. They should, by the time you reach the Lee plantation, have cleared that part of the country of the foe. Do not take undue risk of capture, but I depend upon you to capture Lee, if possible. He must hang for his treasonable crimes."

(Per order) - B. F. BUTLER,

"General Commanding."

Jack Clark drew a deep breath as he embraced the contents and full meaning of this letter.

He knew what it meant.

It was a strange coincidence that they should have but a few hours before visited the Lee plantation.

A sickening sense of an unpleasant duty came to Captain Clark.

He recalled the beautiful Southern girl, Nance Lee, and the nobility of spirit she had shown in assisting them to make their escape from the pursuing Confederates.

To think that he must now return to the plantation and arrest her own father, to be sent to a Union prison and the gallows, was a most unpleasant thing.

It seemed to the chivalrous young Yankee captain that he could not do it.

Scott, the spy, stood by in respectful silence. If he read the thoughts in Jack's mind he did not show it in his face.

For some moments Jack was silent. Then he passed the order over to Hal Martin.

The young lieutenant read it and at once comprehended its meaning. He looked at Jack questioningly.

"Well," said the scout, finally. "Is there an answer to the communication?"

"Yes," replied Jack.

He drew a pencil from his pocket and wrote on the order as follows:

"To GENERAL B. F. BUTLER:

"I have just received your communication. I have captured the horses of a company of Confederate cavalry and have mounted my men, so I am able to proceed to the Lee plantation with all haste. I will apprehend Lucius Lee, the spy, if he can be found, and bring him to Fortress Monroe at the earliest moment. Yours, JACK CLARK,

"Captain Fairdale Blues."

Jack handed this letter to Scott, the spy and scout. He touched his cap and said:

"I wish you success, Captain."

"Thank you. We would gladly offer you refreshment if you will remain with us for awhile."

"I am greatly obliged, but this message must be returned to General Butler at once. Good-day."

The scout disappeared in the bushes and left Jack Clark in a strange state of mind. For a few moments he sat upon his horse, looking at the river.

Never in his life had he been called upon to perform a harder task.

But Jack Clark knew his duty.

He was a soldier of the Union. He had been given an order to execute. At any cost it must be obeyed.

So he turned, and, raising his hand, said in a clear, ringing voice:

"Boys, we are going back to the Lee plantation. Forward, quick trot, march!"

The little company fell into line and followed their leader. They were soon in full gallop.

For an hour they retraced their route along the river.

Then suddenly Jack drew rein. To his ears, as well as those of the other boys, there came the tramp of hoofs and the rattle of cavalry accoutrements.

Into view on a ridge above there came several companies of cavalry. There were fully five hundred men.

But what cheered the hearts of the Boys in Blue more than aught else was the fact that they wore the blue uniform.

A great cheer went up from their lips. The Union major who was at the head of the cavalry drew rein.

At sight of the Blues he turned his column and rode toward them.

He saluted Jack Clark as he halted his men fifty yards distant.

"I am Major Briggs of the Fifth Cavalry," he said. "You seem to be in infantry uniform."

"Yes," replied Jack, "we captured the horses of a company of Confederates. I am Jack Clark, captain of this company, known as the Fairdale Blues. By General Butler's orders we have been holding the line against the Confederate advance."

"I am glad to meet you, Captain Clark. I have heard of you before. I believe we were both at Bull Run, and at that, not among those who ran."

"Really, the boys were quite excusable for running there," said Jack. "It was a most disheartening fight."

"So it was! Yet, a true soldier should never turn his back to the foe. Are you on a special mission, Captain?"

"I am."

"Very good! I have to say that the country about here is quite clear. We have swept back their cavalry with ease. My orders are to hang about Magruder's flank."

"Then I believe his attempt to cross the river will fail."

"I think it will."

"Good!" cried Jack. "I hope it will. I am glad to know that we are not likely to run into an ambuscade hereabouts."

"I don't think you need fear it."

"Very good! As I am in a hurry, Major, I will wish you good-day."

"Good-day, Captain Clark."

The two officers saluted. Major Briggs gave the order to march and the troop of cavalry went galloping on.

Jack turned and gave his men the order to advance.

It was a relief to the young captain to know that the

region about was fairly clear of the foe. In a short while now they had reached the highway which led to the Lee plantation.

Jack's heart almost failed him as he turned his horse into the lane and in a few moments once more came in sight of the house.

And his veins tingled as he saw sitting on the porch the same fair figure of the young girl.

She started up at sight of the Union riders. Her face flushed and showed surprise at sight of Jack.

The young captain dismounted and removing his cap walked up to the porch. He saw her stiffen and grow cold in her manner.

"Miss Lee, I have returned," he said, quietly. "No doubt you are surprised?"

"I must admit that I am," she said, with dignity.

"I assure you it is much against my will, for my mission is a most unpleasant one."

The young girl's face grew deadly pale. She caught at the column of the porch for support.

But only for a moment did she show weakness. Then she said, firmly:

"You have come to take by force what I would not sell you?"

"No," replied Jack, "though I wish I could say that it is no worse."

Her face paled again.

"What do you mean?"

Jack hesitated. Then he burst forth:

"It is no use! I can't tell you in words. It is the stern duty of war. Read that!"

He passed her the order from the Federal commander at Fortress Monroe. She took it and read it slowly.

Not a line of her face changed. She handed the order back to Jack.

"So you will obey this order and take my father away to his death?"

"I—I am sworn—"

"Yes, you are sworn to obey the commands of your superior officer. I know all that, but my father is very dear to me. I have wished you no harm. Now you will come here and rob me of the only one on earth whom I love and the only one who loves me. All because a soldier's duty demands it! And what is that? You call it war! You call yourself a soldier! You know they will hang my father, who never harmed any one in his life! Is it possible that mercy is dead and pity no longer lives in human hearts?"

Jack folded his arms and bowed his head.

"Miss Lee!" he said, with deep feeling, "I assure you this is the hardest moment of my life. War is the greatest curse that ever blighted the earth's face. But duty demands that I incur your hatred and—"

"It is easy for you," she said, earnestly. "Ride on and report that you are unable to find my father. It will never be known. Promise me—"

Jack held up his hand.

"I cannot do that," he said. "Is your father here?"

"He is in the house. I do not fear to tell you that, for I know that you will not take him from me. He, who is so noble and kind, who never harmed any living creature!"

"But the order speaks of him as a spy and the assassin of Fritz Schell——"

"It is false!" she cried, with flaming eyes. "I know that story, and it is trumped up by a villain who came here to play the part of a serpent!" Her face grew scarlet and her eyes fell. "It was Oscar Dalton, and in revenge for my declining his offer of marriage he sought to bring me to his terms by conspiring against my father's life. This, I swear to you, is true."

Her slight figure quivered and tears shone in her eyes. In an instant Jack Clark stepped forth and caught her hand.

"Is this true, Miss Lee? Is there a man alive who could be so base as that?"

"I am speaking the truth," she said.

"If your father is here ask him to come forth. No harm shall come to him I promise you, for I will myself intercede with President Lincoln in his behalf."

Again her Southern spirit flashed forth.

"No!" she said proudly. "We ask for no favor from the Union Government. We are loyal to the Confederacy. We only ask that you will leave us alone!"

Jack bowed and stepped back.

"I am very sorry, Miss Lee," he said, gravely, "but it is necessary for me to obey my orders and take your father to Fortress Monroe. There I will state the full details of the case to General Butler, who is a fair-minded man, and I am sure he will see justice done."

"No! no!" almost screamed Nance. "You must not, you shall not take my father away!"

But just at that moment a man of patrician appearance, whose hair and beard were snow white, stepped out upon the porch.

"Peace, my daughter," he said. "The young captain is right. I am willing to go with him, and I do not fear the results!"

CHAPTER X.

A HAPPY MEETING.

Nance Lee flung herself upon her father's bosom with wild sobs. Jack stepped back respectfully and uncovered his head.

The Boys in Blue sat upon their horses, interested and apparently reverent spectators of the scene. Not one but was deeply touched.

It was a sad scene, but one of those incidents of war which are common, though much to be deprecated.

It was a sad farewell between father and daughter, but Lucius Lee finally stepped down from the piazza and said:

"Captain, I am ready!"

A horse was led forward and Mr. Lee mounted. Jack bowed respectfully to Nance and said:

"All may not be as bad as you may think. Have good courage! I shall report to you later about your father. I think all will be well."

Nance looked into the young officer's eyes, and in her glance was a light of trust and deep respect which thrilled Jack.

A moment more and he was in the saddle.

"Column right! Quick trot! March!"

The order was instantly obeyed and the cavalcade rode away. In their midst, a prisoner, rode Lucius Lee.

In a short while they were out upon the highway.

They had no fear now of riding on the main road to Hampton Bridge. The report of Major Briggs had satisfied Jack that the intervening region was clear of the foe.

On rode the little cavalcade until soon the distant firing of the fight which was still going on at the bridge was heard.

It was not long before, on reaching the summit of a little hill, the smoke of the conflict could be seen.

History touches lightly upon the affair at Hampton Bridge, for a many a desperate fight was made light of as a mere skirmish as compared with the heavy battles of the war.

But those who were present on that occasion to aid in turning back the advance of Magruder can remember well what a hard fight it was.

On rode the little company of Blues. Every moment now they were drawing nearer to the scene.

Presently stragglers were met, one of whom in response to Jack's query, said:

"They're having it hot up there at the bridge. Our boys are holding 'em well. I don't know how it will come out."

"They will need us, boys!" cried Jack. "Forward, all!" The Fairdale Blues gave their horses full rein.

It had been many hours since they had tasted food. The horses were about exhausted. They could not go much further without rest.

Jack knew this, so, as they reached the scene of the combat, he saw that the horses would be of no further use.

The Union line was swung out behind rail-fences for a mile or more. They were keeping up a hot fire on the foe.

So Jack ordered the boys to dismount. A corporal and guard were detailed to look after the horses and Lucius Lee, the prisoner.

Then the rest of the company, with muskets loaded, rushed forward to take their place in the line.

They were ordered to the very front by Colonel Raleigh. With a cheer they took their place and opened fire.

The volleys of musketry, the dull haze of the powder-smoke, was about all the visible evidence of warfare that there was.

But the boys knew that away out there beyond the

wheat fields there were thousands of the 'foe, ready at a favorable opportunity to charge upon them.

The colonels walked along back of the lines, speaking encouragingly to the men and exposing themselves to the deadly fire. In no war of history was ever greater valor displayed than on both sides in the Civil War.

For two hours the Boys in Blue kept up their fire.

Then there came a cheer from the whole line. Across the bridge there came at a rush columns in blue.

Reinforcements had again arrived.

It was plain that General Butler did not intend that Magruder should cross the Hampton River. The whole garrison of Fortress Monroe would be called out if necessary to prevent it.

Into line rushed the reinforcements. The fire now became hotter than ever.

At this time Magruder began to fall back. There was a desire on the part of the Union colonels to charge.

But the orders were not to do so. It was held by General Butler as only necessary to hold the bridge.

And this the Union boys had done. Evening was at hand and the report came that Magruder was in full retreat.

Back to Yorktown he went, defeated in his daring move.

On the field lay many dead and dying. The nurses of the Sanitary Commission were already in evidence.

The Fairdale Blues had been ordered to the rear at last.

After a whole day of fighting, with only frugal rations handed to them in their trenches, they were completely exhausted.

Jack ordered them to go into bivouac by the bridge. Already tents and the wagons of the Commissary Department were on hand.

There was a general feeling that a great victory had been won. The boys, in spite of their fatigue, were in high spirits.

Jack, who was quite worn out, however, had no idea of rest.

He called for horses, and to Corporal Peters he said:

"Detail two men, with yourself, to accompany me to Fortress Monroe with the prisoner, Lucius Lee."

"All right, sir!" cried the little corporal.

In a few moments the detail was ready, but as Jack was crossing the field to the place where the horses were corralled he heard a shrill scream.

In a moment he bounded through a line of bushes and came upon an exciting scene.

In the early twilight he saw a white-capped nurse struggling in the arms of a ragged and burly ruffian.

Jack reached the spot in an instant, unseen by either.

He gave the fellow a terrible blow back of the ear. He went to the ground, though he was in an instant on his feet.

"You cowardly bushwhacker!" cried the young captain. "What do you mean?"

An imprecation dropped from the fellow's lips and he drew a navy pistol and leveled it at Jack.

There was no percussion cap on the tube else the result might have been deadly. In an instant Jack's sword was out and he struck the weapon down with a blow of the flat side.

"You villain!" exclaimed the young captain. "I have a mind to call a detail and have you shot. Be off, or I'll run you through."

The scoundrel was glad enough to shrink away in the gloom. Then Jack turned to face the young nurse.

A great cry escaped the lips of both.

"Jack! My brother!"

"Bessie!"

In another moment brother and sister were clasped in a warm embrace. It was a joyful meeting.

When Jack Clark enlisted and went to war as captain of the Fairdale Blues, Bessie Clark, his sister, could not remain at home.

She was patriotic to the last degree.

"I may not shoulder a musket," she declared, "but I can do fully as efficient work in another way."

So she donned the spotless apron and cap of the Sanitary Commission and became an angel of mercy.

She had just taken the last message of a dying soldier and was about to attend to the thirst-cry of another when the burly ruffian stepped out of the bushes and seized her in his arms.

Jack had arrived just in time to save her from the scoundrel, who was one of the ghouls who frequent every battlefield to rob and murder.

The meeting between brother and sister was an affectionate one.

They had seen each other but once since leaving Fairdale.

"Tell me about mother and father," said Jack, eagerly. "I have not heard from them in weeks."

"I left them in Washington yesterday," said Bessie. "They are well. Mother sent this to you by me."

Bessie gave Jack a small object. The boy soldier looked at and kissed it.

It was a beautiful miniature of a white-haired and sweet-faced old lady. Tears stood in Jack's eyes.

On the back of the miniature was written:

"Do your duty, but return to the one who loves you best after the war is over."

"After the war is over!" repeated the brave young captain of the Blues, while tears welled up in his eyes. "Yes, mother, if God spares me, I will return to you then."

He placed the miniature in the breast pocket of his coat. Then he said:

"I am leaving now for Fortress Monroe, Bessie. In what way can I serve you further? Is it safe for you to be so far away from the other nurses? I will detail a guard to accompany you."

"I have no fear," said Bessie. "It is not often a nurse is attacked. I do not believe it will occur again."

"Well, good-bye, sister."

"Good-bye, and God protect you."

Then the young nurse went about her work of mercy. The young captain of the Blues went back to his tent.

The detail under Corporal Peters, with the prisoner in charge, was ready. Jack mounted his horse and they rode away.

It was long after dark when they applied at the picket guard of the great fort.

Jack had the countersign, so had no trouble in entering. He at once dismounted and sent his name by an orderly to General Butler.

In a few moments the orderly came back.

"You are requested to bring the prisoner into the general's presence," he said.

Jack ordered Peters to escort the prisoner. The three then marched into General Butler's tent.

The noted commander sat at his table. He was alone.

"Well, Clark," he said, "I am glad to see you. I know you have brought me good news."

"I have carried out your orders, sir."

General Butler looked at the white-haired Southern planter, and a curious expression crossed his face.

"Is this the man who killed Fritz Scheff?" he asked, quietly.

"No, sir!" replied Lucius Lee, with quiet dignity and the conviction of truth. "I did not kill Fritz Scheff. I am not guilty of that foul charge!"

"Yes, yes!" cried General Butler, quietly. "Of course, that is the proper plea for you to make!"

Many a criminal case he had conducted, and with success. It was almost as if he regarded Lee as a client.

In spite of himself Jack Clark almost yielded to a smile.

But the haughty spirit of the Southerner repelled the insinuation. His eyes flashed and he retorted:

"No, sir! I am making no plea. I am not on trial, sir. I am absolutely innocent of this charge against me, and I refute it, sir!"

General Butler bowed again.

"Very good, sir! I suppose you have evidence to support your claim. There is nothing like evidence, sir. Sentiment has nothing to do with war or with law."

"I cannot expect fair play from a race which knows not sentiment, but only cold, calculating methods of what they are pleased to term as justice, but which is really a travesty upon the term."

"Quite wrong, sir," said General Butler. "Only perfect justice can be enacted by separation from sentiment. That defeats justice, which is blind."

"But sympathy with the falsely accused is not the sort of sentiment to which you refer."

"That is another matter," said General Butler, calmly. "Now, sir, I am a lawyer and you are a planter. You know more about the affairs of a plantation than I. On the other hand, I assume to know more about the law. Am I not right?"

"I presume so."

"Very good. The law says that every man is innocent until proven guilty. Now, you are charged with guilt. Until you are proven guilty, that charge conveys nothing more than mere form. Therefore, it is necessary that you, on your part, disprove the charge. I know you Southerners well. You deal in the sentimental principles of honor. I would not fear, personally, to take your word, but there are others whose word I would not take. Therefore, in the equality of law you must meet with the same obligation as the man who lies to save his neck. Do you gather my meaning?"

The planter's face flushed.

"I do not deny your principles of honor as not being equal to ours," he said, "but you deal by method. We deal by courtesy. For my part, I prefer courtesy."

"Which I prefer myself in dealing with men of your stamp," said General Butler. "But all men are not like you. It is just such little matters as this that has caused the trouble between these two parts of our country. The people of the South cannot understand the people of the North. There has never been sufficient intercourse between these two sections for affiliation, but it may come—after the war!"

CHAPTER XI.

A QUESTION OF JUSTICE.

The instincts of the lawyer could not be restrained by General Butler at that moment.

A light of interest lit up the Southerner's face.

"That is a new light upon the subject," he said. "I had never thought of looking at it in that way before."

"There you are!" said the clever lawyer. "There must be a war, there must be bloodshed and fierce strife before this great and necessary tie between the two sections of our country is welded to last for all time."

"On the other hand, are you not conscious of the fact that the people of the South are simply striving for rights and privileges which the North and its statesmen seek to deprive them of?"

"In a measure there may be justice in your assertion, but it would be infinitely better to fight it out in a family way, in the halls of Congress, than to create a dividing line which will weaken the whole country. In union there is might."

"We seek our rights and the privilege of living in our own way."

"Well," said General Butler, wearily, "we are all wrong in this great controversy. War is wrong, anyway, but that does not settle this matter of yours. You plead not guilty to this charge made against you by Congressman Oscar Dalton. He has sworn that you shot your man dead in a quarrel. The body was found, and your pistol beside it. What is your defense?"

"Is this the court before which I am to be tried?"

"We shall see. It may be necessary to send you to Washington, but I am skeptical of your guilt. Now, if you can furnish me the necessary evidence to clear you, I shall take great pleasure in quashing the case right here."

A light of hope and pleasure lit up the face of the prisoner.

"Do you mean that you will set me free?" he asked.

"We shall see."

Lucius Lee stepped forward and drew from his pocket a letter. He laid it on the table before General Butler.

"If you will read this," he said, "it may give you a good idea of the motive which impelled Dalton to seek to fasten this crime upon me."

General Butler took the letter and read it slowly.

His face changed as he did so.

"To LUCIUS LEE, Esq.:

"MY DEAR SIR—I have asked your daughter for her hand in marriage and she has refused me. Now, sir, I am not to be balked in my purpose. I love her and can give her a happy home. I demand that you use your influence with her, or I will furnish certain evidence that will place you on the gallows. You know what I mean. Yours truly,

"OSCAR DALTON."

"The night before my receipt of that letter," said Mr. Lee, "Fritz Scheff was killed in a Washington hotel."

"Ah!" said General Butler. "Where were you at the time?"

"In Washington, at the Ebbitt House."

"It was in that hotel that Mr. Scheff was murdered, was it not?"

"Yes."

"Can you establish any sort of an alibi?"

"Yes."

"Do so."

"I would have to call upon certain witnesses in Washington."

"Ah! I see! I fear it will be necessary for you to go before the Washington court. You shall have the best of fair play."

The planter bowed with dignity.

But before he could speak, there was a commotion at the tent door. Then an orderly appeared.

"General," he said, with a salute, "a young woman, who says she must see General Butler, is outside. She rushed past the guards and insisted on coming here."

"It is my daughter!" cried Lee.

"Your daughter!" exclaimed General Butler. "Let her come in, orderly."

The next moment into the tent rushed Nance Lee. She flung herself into her father's arms.

"Ah, father!" she cried, wildly. "I have come to die with you! I cannot live without you. They must shoot me, too!"

There was a tableau. Tears streamed down the face of the aged planter. The orderlies turned their faces and Jack bowed his head low.

General Butler's face was inscrutable. For a moment he was silent.

Then Nance turned to him and held out her hands.

"I know you Northern generals are merciless!" she cried. "I know my father is a Confederate, but he is noble and good and true. He never harmed any one in his life. He is old and feeble and all I have left in the world to care for and love. Oh, I pray you, let him go! Spare him! You are a great general! It is in your power!"

History does not speak particularly of General Butler as given to showing mercy to a foe.

But, lawyer as he was, he saw in the young girl's manner and words an appeal more forcible than any he had ever witnessed in a courtroom.

Perhaps it was this which appealed to his clemency. It might have been the rare beauty of Nance Lee, which sure-

ly was enough to move the spirit of any more than ordinary mortal.

He turned and glanced at the prisoner. Then he chewed the end of an unlit cigar, and said, carelessly:

"Got a good plantation, Lee?"

Nance stepped back. For an instant a light of hope had shown in her eyes, but it faded. Surely a man who could indulge in such triviality in such a moment of tense suffering was cold and heartless.

"My plantation is a very good one, sir," replied the planter.

"Good! Let me see, do you belong to the Confederate Congress?"

"No, sir!"

"You attended the Secession Convention in Richmond?"

"I did."

"Just so! You have intended serving in the Confederate Army?"

"I am too old. If I were young, I should bear arms for my country."

"Just the idea! You would work for the Confederacy? Have you done any work as a spy?"

"No, sir," replied Lee, indignantly. "That is a calling I do not stoop to."

"Excellent!" said the Union general, with a yawn. "Orderly, call my horse out. Also saddle two horses, one for Mr. Lee and one for Miss Lee. I will ride down with them to see if President Lincoln comes down on that ten o'clock train. Captain Clark, you will report to me in the morning."

Jack saluted and turned. As he did so he gave Nance an encouraging glance.

In later days Jack got the story of the fate of the Lees.

The horses were brought as per the general's order. They mounted and rode away. To Nance and her father it was most puzzling.

In a few moments they had galloped past the picket guard. They were on the road to Hampton.

For a mile they rode on. Then General Butler drew rein.

"Miss Lee," he said, courteously, "I salute you as a faithful daughter and the fairest of all Southern maidens. Your father I know to be a man of honor. I feel assured that he will never bear arms against his brethren of the North. I know he is not guilty of murder. I want you both to feel that the men of the North can be generous as well as methodical. Yonder is the road to Hampton. You know the way well."

Astonished, father and daughter sat upon the horses and stared at the Union general. Then Lucius Lee said:

"What! You set me free?"

"Yes."

In an instant the generous spirit of the Southerner was touched. He spoke up, with warm spirit:

"I cannot accept so kind a favor of you, General Butler. You shall not compromise yourself to spare me."

"There is no compromise," said the famous general, quietly. "I am acting wholly upon the basis of justice and quite within the law."

"You are kind—"

"Not so, sir. You are an innocent man. On this charge of murder you are not guilty. To be sure, I might send you to Washington and the formality of a trial might be gone through with, but you would be cleared. There is no case against you, sir! On the other charge, of treason against the U. S. Government, if I were to arrest you, I should have to arrest nearly every planter in the South. My viewpoint is that of a lawyer, sir. There is no case against you, but I would advise you to keep away from Washington."

"Heaven bless you, sir!" cried Nance, joyfully. "You will be rewarded!"

"I am already rewarded, young lady," said the great general. "But it is not well for you to linger here. Yonder is the way. You will pass one more picket. Here is a pass for you. Go back to the plantation and wait for the war to end."

"God bless you, sir!" cried Lee, with deep feeling. "Every hour our prayer shall be now that the war is ended and good feeling and friendship once more established."

"It will come. Good-night!"

General Butler wheeled his horse and galloped away. When he returned to his tent he met Captain Clark.

"All right, Clark," he said, cheerily. "I have disposed of the prisoners. Now to turn in for a good night's rest."

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH ENDS THE TALE.

Jack Clark never saw Nance Lee or her father again. Succeeding incidents took him into another part of the country.

But he often thought of the beautiful Southern girl and her white-haired father, and their rigid ideas of principle and honor, and he felt a thrill of respect for them.

The next day Jack joined his company.

The Blues were much refreshed by their night's rest.

Their ranks were recruited by some young men from Washington.

Then from General Butler came a fresh commission. It was to do patrol duty along the Hampton River, just above the bridge where the fighting had been done.

Confederate raiders had been active in that section, and it was deemed necessary to clean them out.

With this commission Jack and his comrades were well pleased.

It promised them plenty of exciting work, although it might be dangerous.

To the soldier nothing is so irksome as inactivity. There is a desire to be doing something—a feverish longing for a battle. The tension of nerves is sometimes more than can be easily endured.

So the Blues were delighted.

It did not take Jack long to march them out to their post. This was on the south bank of the river. There was not a little risk in their position.

They were expected to hold this position at any cost. An overwhelming force might at any moment descend upon them and drive them back into the river.

But the Blues made camp and set their picket line.

Thus matters were when one day a man came into camp. He was at once recognized by Jack.

"Thad Scott, the scout!" he exclaimed. "What message have you brought me now?"

"One you may not like," said the scout. "I will let you read it."

Jack read the message:

"To CAPTAIN CLARK:

"I have information of the presence of a band of raiders in the vicinity of Squirrel Ridge, north of your position. You will follow the lead of the bearer, Thad Scott, to their camping place and destroy their camp and equipments. Capture all the prisoners you can and report to me at the earliest possible day."

"(Signed) B. F. BUTLER,
General Commanding."

In an instant Jack turned to Scott.

"We are with you, my man!" he cried. "That is just the job we are looking for."

Scott shook his head.

"I don't know," he said, dubiously. "Have you ever heard of Red Smith, who leads this band of raiders?"

"No."

"Well, he is the worst man in the whole South. He is the most lawless and cruel of all desperadoes. He is as

treacherous as brave, and he is, all around, the worst man to defeat whom you could run up against."

"Is that so?" said Jack, quietly. "Well, on the whole, I believe he is just the sort of a gentleman I shall be glad to meet. No doubt we shall have plenty of sport with him."

"I think we shall," said Scott. "However, if you are glad of the job, so am I. I like your spirit."

"We may get a licking," said Jack, "but we have orders to destroy that camp of raiders, and I am going to do it!"

"Bravo! I'll take pleasure in showing you their camp and assisting you to do it."

"Very good, Mr. Scott!"

Jack at once called his company out and they formed for the march. The hour was ten in the morning.

It was reckoned that by three in the afternoon the march should be completed and then the battle would transpire. With eager spirits the Blues set out.

The march was over a rolling region, with dells and dales and sometimes a muddy stream to cross.

The boys marched rapidly.

At two o'clock Scott, the guide, had brought them to the head of a deep ravine.

"Ah!" he said, pointing down this, "do you see that?"

Far down at the other end of the ravine was a column of smoke.

It rose irregularly and lazily on the air of the hot August afternoon. A fire at that time of day, and in such a tropical clime, could mean but one thing.

And this was the presence of a camp. Undoubtedly it was the camp of the raiders.

"There you are," cried Scott. "It is the camp of Red Smith."

"All right, boys," cried Jack, "here is our work all cut out for us."

"Hurrah!" cried the Boys in Blue.

Jack led the way down the ravine. A short ways below he caused the company to divide ranks.

One detachment, under Hal Martin, went along the right side of the gully.

The other, headed by Jack, went to the left.

With muskets cocked and ready for use the Boys in Blue rushed on. As was to be expected, presently they ran upon one of the pickets.

For the raiders had a regularly conducted camp. There was an exchange of shots.

There was no time to lose now, for the raiders would certainly be warned. So the boys rushed on.

The next moment musket shots rang through the glen.

There was a terrific yell, and out of the woods came a body of mounted men.

They outnumbered the little company of Union boys. In an instant there was a terrific melee.

The division under Hal Martin received the brunt of the attack.

They were for a moment mixed up with the tangle of horses and riders. Muskets cracked and sabres flashed. It was a hand-to-hand contest.

Jack Clark now displayed his quick wit and ability as a strategist.

Quick as thought he saw the necessary move to make and made it. Across the ravine upon the rear of the raiders he sent his detachment.

The wisdom of dividing the company into two detachments was now seen.

The attack in the rear was so sudden and unexpected that the raiders were confused, and panic seized them.

Hal Martin and his boys were fighting furiously. At the head of the raiders was the notorious Red Smith himself.

He was a tall, powerfully built man, with a fiery red mustache extending from ear to ear.

It was this appendage which had earned him the name of Red Smith.

He was a daring rider and a master with the sword.

Into the midst of the melee he rode. Jack saw him and was filled with the resolve to head him off and engage him in personal combat.

The young captain of the Blues was, as we know, an excellent swordsman.

He had trained with one of the best fencers in Europe. He did not fear the swash-buckling tactics of Smith.

So he aimed to reach him.

Bullets were whistling and swords were flashing. Like a mad bull Smith urged his men on.

"Get them, boys!" he yelled. "Don't let them escape! Eat them up!"

"Steady, Blues!" shouted Jack. "Give them a volley."

Then in some way there was a clearing away of the fighting mass of men.

Jack found himself within reach of the giant. His sword leaped forward and, piercing Smith's arm, caused him to drop his blade.

"Come on, you red monster! If you are a man of courage here is your chance."

Smith recovered his weapon.

"You!" he cried, tauntingly. "I fight men, and not boys! Get out of the way, you midget!"

But Jack did not get out of the way. He swung his sword and crossed blades with Red Smith.

The next moment they were fencing madly. Smith tried in vain to beat his way through Jack's guard.

The young captain held him bravely and just then the cavalry gave way and fled precipitately down the glen.

Hal and his boys cut off a good many of them and forced them to surrender. It looked like victory for the Fairdale Blues.

"You worm!" cried Smith, fiercely, as he tried to beat Jack down. "I'll have your heart for this!"

The big brute's temper was up, now that he saw that his men were defeated. He pressed forward fiercely.

It was just what Jack wanted. The young captain took advantage of that moment to turn his wrist with lightning quickness and pierce his enemy's sword-arm again.

The blade dropped from Smith's fingers. His arm was helpless now.

Aghast and defeated he stood before his conqueror. He was a burly brute, and a coward as well.

"Surrender!" cried Jack. "I give you a chance. I ought to cut you down for a murderer and a thief, but I give you the chance. Surrender!"

"I cave!" agreed Smith. "You're the best man. I am beaten!"

In a moment Smith was disarmed and given over to a detail of men. By this time the Blues had made many captives in the ravine below.

Some of the raiders escaped.

But the camp was broken up.

In a few moments the Boys in Blue had it in their possession. Many horses, camp equipments and guns were captured.

It was a remarkable and daring feat. The youthful company assembled after the fight to find that a dozen of their number had been killed.

But they had won a great victory and covered themselves with glory. This was certainly enough.

When the news reached Washington of the capture of Red Smith, President Lincoln sent a personal letter of congratulation to the Blues and their young captain. This was very gratifying and added greatly to their reputation.

The camp of Red Smith had been effectually broken up, but on their march back to Hampton other incidents befell the little company of soldier boys.

The Blues made bivouac on the spot for the night, with their prisoners under guard. They were too much exhausted to march back to Hampton at once.

Thad Scott, the scout, who had been in the thickest of the fight, now announced his determination of taking his leave.

"I have to go south to a small town on the banks of

the James," he said. "I have some secret service work to do there."

"Well," said Jack, "I am sorry you cannot remain with us to-night. We have full rations and can give you plenty to eat."

"I thank you," replied the scout, "but my time is limited. When I report to General Butler I will tell him what a brave fight you made."

"I am sure that is very kind."

Scott took his leave a short while later. Just as he was about to pass out of the lines of the encampment a sudden thought struck him and he returned.

"Captain Clark," he said, "will you do me a favor?"

"With the utmost pleasure," replied Jack.

The scout took from the pocket of his blouse a letter and said:

"On your homeward march you will pass a house on the Yorktown Road. It is built partly of brick and is known as the Early house. One of the raiders a few moments ago asked me, in his dying moments, to deliver this letter to a very aged woman who lives there and whom he describes as his mother. Will you assume this task for me?"

"I will do so with pleasure," said Jack, with a low bow. "Poor fellow! I can imagine the distress of the mother when she learns that her son is dead!"

"Just so! I could not refuse his request, but it will be much out of my way to go there. So I will leave the task to you."

"I will see that it is fulfilled."

"Very good!"

Jack placed the letter in his pocket securely. He thought of his own parents at home and how anxiously they awaited news from him.

The next morning at an early hour the Blues struck camp and started on the return march with their prisoners.

With the music of drum and fife they now marched down into the highway, for there was no longer need to proceed with caution.

Squirrel Ridge was left behind them, and in due time they came out upon the Yorktown Road.

Jack now remembered his commission. He had told Hal about it, and the young lieutenant was interested.

When the house described by Scott came into view Jack halted his company. Red Smith, the leader of the raiders, who was marching with the prisoners, now cried out:

"Poor Jeff Early lived thar! His mother will feel bad to learn his fate. Will ye jest give her the word, Captain, that he died for the Southern flag as a true man should?"

"I shall carry to her his last word," said Jack. "Perhaps you can break the news to her better than I."

"No," demurred the raider. "I'm a rough talker. You kin do it a heap better, but she's got ther Southern spirit and she'll stand it all right."

Jack walked up to the vine-covered porch of the plantation house.

He saw a black woman through an open door at her work. Partly sheltered by the vines there sat an old lady whose silvered hair but added to the sweetness of a beauty which age had tried in vain to efface.

Jack took off his cap and bowed before her. The old lady's eyes flashed as she saw the blue uniform.

"Oh, it's one of you Northern interlopers," she said, in a scathing tone. "Our boys will drive you back to your own side of the line. What do you want here?"

"I have come to bring you this, madam," said Jack, with deep respect and softness in his voice. "It will convince you of the unholy character of this war. It is from your son, and is brought to you by a Northern man."

The proud spirit of the Southern woman for a moment wavered. She took the letter and raised her eyes, in which were a mist of tears.

"Jeff is dead?" she asked.

"Yes."

"He gave his life for his country. I cannot find fault. Perhaps it is well, for I shall soon follow. Wait! You have a good face. Are all Northern men like you?"

"There are many better men than I in the North," said Jack.

She looked at him steadily through tear-wet eyes. Then her aged head drooped. The letter lay in her lap. Jack softly turned and left her with her sorrow.

She was only one of thousands. The young captain marched on with his boys. In due time they reached their camp and the prisoners were sent to Fortress Monroe.

The Boys in Blue enjoyed but a brief period of rest. They were soon engaged in other thrilling experiences, of which we will write in a future story.

THE END.

Read "ON A FORCED MARCH; OR, THE BOYS IN GRAY TO THE RESCUE," which will be the next number (4) of "Blue and Gray Weekly."

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